

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 27 : Number Three : Fall 2006

Cultivating Awe

Union with God

A Gift for All Christians

Stress Management

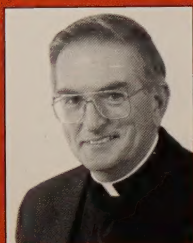
Spiritual Struggles

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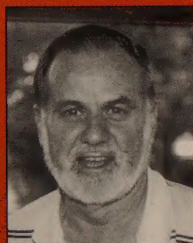
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WILLIAM A. BARRY, S.J., a priest, author, spiritual director, and lecturer, is codirector of the Jesuit tertianship program in the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. He lives at Campion Center in Weston, Massachusetts.



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LINDA AMADEO, R.N., M.S., works as a consultant to the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality located in Nairobi, Kenya.



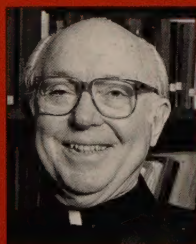
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LOUGHLAN SOFIELD, S.T., M.A., has conducted workshops on psychology and ministry in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, and India.



SENIOR EDITOR

BRENDA HERMANN, M.S.B.T., M.S.W., is a facilitator and consultant to groups and organizations. She has worked in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Australia, Central America, and South America.



FOUNDING EDITOR

JAMES J. GILL, S.J., M.D., a priest and psychiatrist, died peacefully on July 29, 2003, after a courageous battle with prostate and bone cancer.

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, 61 Main Street, Suite 2-S, Old Saybrook, CT 06475.
Phone: (860) 395-4742 / Fax: (860) 395-4769 / E-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

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SENIOR EDITOR

Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.

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Brenda Hermann, M.S.B.T., M.S.W.

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Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Editorial Office: **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, 61 Main Street, Suite 2-S, Old Saybrook, CT 06475; phone: (860) 395-4742; fax: (860) 395-4769; e-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

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Editor's Page

SPIRITUALITY AND HEALTHY LIVING

In an article accepted for publication in *America* ("An Adult Relationship of Friendship with God,") I developed the analogy of an adult relationship with one's parents to explore the kind of relationship God might want with us as adults. As we mature, we become more like peers with our parents; we share stories, advice, pains and joys in a different way than we did as children. Of course, most of us would never dream of using our parents' first names, but still we do engage in conversations that are more like those of equals, even friends, as we grow older. I recall my sister and her late husband delighting in the development of such a relationship with their adult children.

It occurred to me, too, that sometimes parents engage a family business into which they invite their adult children as partners. When this happens, the relationship between parents and children changes into more of mutual friendship where each shares in running the enterprise. I then speculated that God, in creating this universe, has indeed invited us as adults into a relationship of friendship and to join God's family business.

If God wants friendship with us, then growth in friendship has to mean a development from a child's relationship with God to an adult relationship. This requires some kind of a regimen or spirituality. The only way to develop a relationship is by engaging in it, with all its ups and downs. Which brings us to the theme of most of this issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. The Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium, held at Regis University, Denver, on June 16-17, 2006, had as its topic "Spirituality and Healthy Living." We are privileged to present most of these talks as articles in this issue.

The keynote speaker, Kenneth Pargament, Ph.D., of Bowling Green University and one of the world's experts on psychology and spirituality, presents evidence that spiritual crises constitute a fork in the road toward or away from healthy living or maturation. I hope that you will find his ideas as inspiring as I did.

Although Dr. Pargament does not himself make the point, it seems to me that his research points toward the conclusion that the turn toward a more mature outlook on life depends on becoming an adult friend of God.

Readers of the Pargament essay will note that one of the catalysts for growth toward maturity through a spiritual crisis is having a large rather than a small image of who God is. In my essay, *Union with God or Finding God's Will*, I was referring to such a large image of God.

Recently I have begun reading Robert Wuthnow's *American Mythos: Why Our Best Efforts to Be a Better Nation Fall Short*. In his second chapter he makes the point that a good society encourages "a delicate balance between the autonomous individual who pursues individual happiness and the responsible individual who contributes to the common good" (p. 41). He goes on to point out that psychology's ideas about human flourishing overlap with what the good society encourages.

Individuals who flourish have an internal moral compass that guides their thinking about right and wrong. They have become differentiated from their families and communities. They take responsibility for their own happiness. At the same time, they seek support when they need it and they usually receive gratification from their social attachments and their efforts to help others. There is thus a balance between egoism and altruism, between self-fulfillment and caring for others.... A good society requires good people (pp. 41-42).

It seems to me that the articles in this issue bear on Wuthnow's hopes and will inspire you toward a spiritual path that will lead to a more healthy way of life, not only for us as individuals but also for us as community members.

Returning to the idea of God's family business, one image has to do with how we care for our universe and one another. Too often, when we think of God's family business, we think it refers to the Church. This is a great mistake and tends to separate what goes on in

Church on Sundays from what goes on in the “real world” the rest of the week. No, God’s family business is the universe. God creates this universe out of pure generosity, not need, in order to invite us human beings into a harmonious relationship with God, with one another and with the whole universe. No matter what our role in life as adults, we can engage in God’s family business; that is, we can do whatever work we do as part of God’s work. We can do our part to make the world a place where human beings live with less fear of one another and more trust by being people of less fear and more trust ourselves. All of us, no matter what our role, can be part of God’s solution for what ails the world. This is part of what it means to develop a spirituality that leads to healthful living.

In separate essays Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D., develops ways of engaging with God in the family business. In the process of writing a book whose tentative title is, *God Wants Our Friendship*, I have come to believe that God’s hope in creating human beings in this universe is to invite us into friendship with God. Of course, friendship with God entails friendship with all of God’s friends, potentially the whole of humanity. Moreover, a generous reading of Genesis’ injunction, that human beings should care for the universe as stewards of God, would lead us to use the universe in a friendly way, in a way that would lead to a sustainable environment where all can live as friends of God and of one another and in harmony with the energies of the universe. If we do develop a spirituality of an adult friendship with God, we will indeed live in a more healthy way in this world.

Of course, we will not avoid suffering and death, both our own and that of those we love. But we believe

that, through thick and thin, through weal and woe, we are accompanied by God, the Holy Three in One, who creates us for friendship with God now and forever.

With the analogy of an adult relationship with parents, we note that God depends on our ingenuity and adult responsibility to make the work go well. We are not robots, but partners in God’s dream for our planet. God’s dream for our world will not come about without our cooperation. We cannot have a sustainable environment unless we cooperate in making it sustainable. We will not have peace on earth if human beings do not allow their hearts to be transformed from fearful hearts to forgiving and loving hearts, hearts that reach out to the stranger as a brother or sister. God is vulnerable indeed and wants adult friends who work together with God to achieve the dream of a world where “they will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11: 9).

I hope that the articles in this issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT will contribute to your own friendship with God and help you to develop a spirituality for healthy living. The future of our planet and of our children depends on our cooperation with God in the family business. Only I can do my part in the business; only you can do yours. But all of us are important to God’s hopes and dreams for the universe. If God has such big hopes for us, how can we fail to be generous in assessing what we can do?

Bill Barry, S.J.

William A. Barry, S.J.
Editor-in-Chief

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES

as a Fork in the Road to Healthy Living

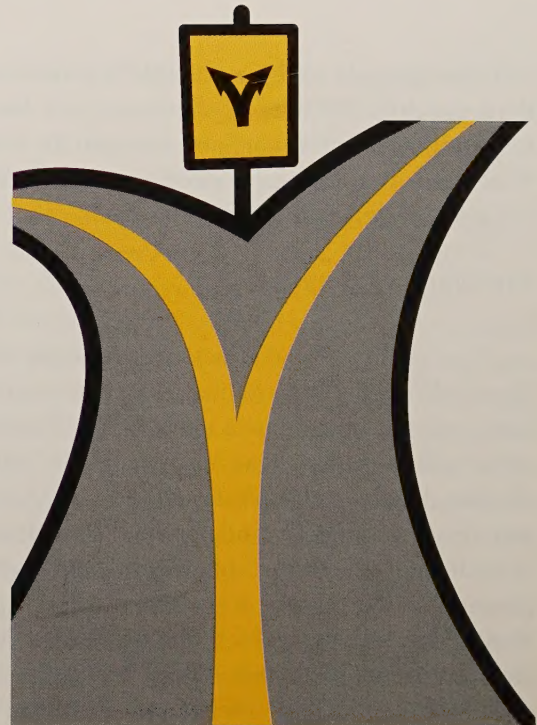
Kenneth I. Pargament, Ph.D.

This article is based on a talk given at the Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver on June 16-17, 2006.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, psychologists have tended either to shy away from the topic of spirituality or approach it with bias and stereotype. At times, I have to admit, I have found it embarrassing to read what psychologists have written about religious and spiritual life. Fortunately, there are signs of change. What I can offer here is a psychological perspective that grows out of research, theory, and my own clinical experience in working with spiritual issues in psychotherapy over the past 30 years.

In this article I would like to focus on one element of spirituality, spiritual struggles, make two points, and then raise one question. The first point is that spiritual struggles are a natural part of spirituality. The second point is that spiritual struggles represent a critical fork in the road, one that can lead to spiritual disengagement and decline and one that can lead to spiritual growth and transformation. This line of study leads to a terribly important question: What determines which direction people will take at these critical junctions in life? I



At times, however, internal changes or external life stressors insist on change, and we enter a period of spiritual transformation in which we re-define the way we understand and approach the sacred.

will discuss some of these potentially pivotal factors and then conclude by talking about some of the practical implications of this theory and research for work in spiritual formation. Let me preface my remarks by presenting my own definition of spirituality.

A DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, the eminent psychologist of religion, Bernard Spilka, once wrote, is a “fuzzy construct.” In some ways, it represents a modern day Rorschach card onto which people can project their own visions, dreams, ideals, and aspirations. Perhaps then it should not be surprising to find sharp discrepancies in the meanings of this term. Some say it is equivalent to religiousness. Others say it stands apart from or even opposed to religiousness. Some say it has everything to do with the divine, while others says it has little to do with God, but instead refers to the best that is human, be it a sense of meaning and purpose, a sense of connectedness to others, or authenticity in living. Some say it has to do with a way of experiencing the world, others say it has to do with a particular set of practices, beliefs, or relationships.

I am not going to resolve these differences here. But I would like to offer my own definition of spirituality as a basis for this paper. I define spirituality as a search for the sacred. There are two key terms here: sacred and search. The sacred refers not only to concepts of God, higher powers, and transcendent beings, but also to other aspects of life that take on divine character and significance through their association with or representation of the holy. Virtually any dimension can be perceived as holy, worthy of veneration or reverence. As stated by Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, “by sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called Gods or spirits; a rock, a tree, a spring,

a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred.”

The second key term in my definition of spirituality is “search.” People search for the sacred. Although this notion may not seem particularly striking to people who are a part of religious communities, it is a radical idea to psychologists who have tried to explain religious and spiritual phenomena in terms of ostensibly more fundamental psychological, social or spiritual processes. My definition of spirituality rests on the premise that spirituality is a significant and distinctive motivation in and of itself.

The concept of search also suggests that spirituality is not static. It does not refer to a fixed set of beliefs, practices, or experiences. It is, instead, a process, one made up of three critical elements: discovery, conservation, and transformation. People discover the sacred through personal encounter and revelation or through socialization within family, church, and the larger culture as a whole. Once discovered, the sacred becomes a “place to be.” People try to foster, hold on to, and sustain their relationship with whatever they may hold sacred in life. Toward this end, they can pursue many spiritual pathways that are designed for the purpose of spiritual conservation. These include the pathways of spiritual study, spiritual practice, spiritual experience, spiritual relationships, and spiritual coping. At times, however, internal changes or external life stressors insist on change, and we enter a period of spiritual transformation in which we re-define the way we understand and approach the sacred. Once transformed, we again attempt to conserve our newly defined understanding of the sacred. And the process continues. Each individual’s search for the sacred is in some ways distinctive. Over the course of the lifespan, many of us may experience the sacred journey as relatively smooth and steady. Most of us, however, encounter some surprising twists and turns in this process.

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES AS A NATURAL PART OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Where do spiritual struggles fit into the search for the sacred? At times, life events throw us out of kilter. They may shake us spiritually as well as psychologically, socially, and physically. The result is spiritual struggle. Struggles are defined as expressions of tension and conflict over sacred matters. We can distinguish between three types of spiritual struggles: intrapsychic spiritual struggles that reflect tensions and conflicts within the

individual; interpersonal spiritual struggles which take place between the individual and his/her religious/spiritual community, and divine struggles which involve conflicts between the individual and God.

These are not new concepts. People have been encountering spiritual struggles for thousands of years. We can find illustrations of all three types of spiritual struggles in the sacred texts of the great religions of the world: the internal struggle of Siddhartha Gautama as he confronted a series of temptations beneath the Bo tree on the evening before he became the Buddha, the interpersonal struggle of Moses who shattered the tablets containing the Ten Commandments after witnessing the people of Israel worshipping the Golden Calf, and the struggle of Jesus Christ on the cross, crying out to the Lord, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Spiritual struggles are not a thing of the past. Stories of modern day spiritual struggles are plentiful. Listen to the intrapsychic struggle of one adolescent: "Is Christianity a big sham, a cult? If an organization were to evolve in society, it would have to excite people emotionally, it would have to be self-perpetuating, it would need to be a source of income, etc. Christianity fits all of these. How do I know that I haven't been sucked into a giant perpetual motion machine?" (from an unpublished dissertation by W. P. Kooistra, 1990, p. 95). Or consider the work of Neal Krause and his colleagues (2000) who identified a variety of interpersonal spiritual struggles elderly church members experienced in their relationships with fellow members. Gossiping, cliquishness, and hypocrisy were sources of consternation to these longstanding members. One member put it this way: "They get off in a corner and talk about you and you're the one that's there on Saturday working with their children and ironing the priest's vestments and doing all that kind of thing and washing the dishes on Sunday afternoon after church. But they don't have the Christian spirit" (p. 519). Finally, listen to Tony Hendra's moving account of the night in which he felt he had been abandoned by God, taken from the wonderful biography of his priest, *Father Joe*.

"I was falling, in an elevator with its cables severed, accelerating down into the blackness of the shaft. I opened my eyes and was still falling—faster now—plunging into a chasm with no bottom, its dark sides rushing by me, and I knew even as I fell that my faith was being torn

As painful as they may be, spiritual struggles are a natural and normal part of spiritual development.

from me by the slipstream of my descent, as if I'd been flung from the battlements of my certainty. . . I was utterly alone. I had never felt such loneliness, to be existentially alone, alone in my existence; so nightmarish was the feeling that I wasn't even sure I did exist. Which threw me into an even greater panic" (pp. 88-89).

As painful as they may be, spiritual struggles are a natural and normal part of spiritual development. They are signs of a spirituality in transition—launching pads for change and transformation. Without struggle, we would remain frozen in the religions of our childhood, crystalline structures ill-equipped to deal with the changes we experience within ourselves over time and the changes we encounter in a complex, fast-paced world.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that many people report spiritual struggles. In one survey of adults in the United States, 65% reported some sort of religious conflict in their lives, most of which were interpersonal in nature [Nielsen, M. E. (1998). "An Assessment of Religious Conflicts and Their Resolutions." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37, 181-190]. According to a national survey of Presbyterians taken by N. Krause and his colleagues in 1999, only 35% indicated that they had never had any religious doubts (reported in *The Gerontologist*, 39, 525-533). Other survey studies have shown that divine struggles are not altogether rare; approximately 10% to 50% of various samples express negative emotions to God, including, feelings of abandonment, anger, anxiety, and fear.

These statistics might suggest to some that religious faith in the United States is declining, but I believe this would be inaccurate. Spiritual struggles are not a sign of weak faith. Consider the following example. "I am told that God lives in me—and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.... I want God with all the power of my soul—and yet between us there is terrible separation....

People who undergo spiritual struggles are more likely to report personal growth and positive spiritual transformation.

Heaven from every side is closed.” Many people would be surprised to learn that these were the words of Mother Teresa who experienced profound feelings of divine abandonment as she began her work with homeless children and dying people in the slums of Calcutta. Yet Mother Teresa’s example is not unusual. From Moses to Jesus to Buddha, the heroic figures of the world’s great religious traditions also faced spiritual turmoil of their own, only to be strengthened and steeled through the process. Though spiritual struggles led to growth and transformation for these remarkable individuals, spiritual struggles are not without risk. Positive outcomes of spiritual struggles are not inevitable.

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES AS A FORK IN THE ROAD

Change is never easy. Jean Piaget, the father of child psychology, observed that even children resist change. Confronted with new situations, the child’s first tendency is to apply existing, tried-and-true modes of thought and practice. Parents know that they have to be careful about placing small objects in the hands of their young children because they make the assumption that small objects are to be eaten. Repeatedly they may try to ingest bouncing balls, toy figures, and colorful books and find that they are not particularly tasty. Piaget found that, only after many failed efforts to assimilate (i.e., apply existing modes of thought and practice to new situations) do children accommodate (i.e., begin to think about these objects in a new and different way). Aha! Toys are not to be eaten, they are to be played with. Change, Piaget concluded, is not easy, but it is essential to growth and maturation.

Piaget’s conclusions apply to adults as well as children. Like children, adults resist change. This point holds true for the spiritual domain. People try to protect and preserve their spiritual beliefs and practices as long as possible. Nevertheless, internal and external

forces have a way of insisting on change at times and, when they do, the individual may be thrown into spiritual struggle.

These struggles are pivotal times of life. On the one hand, empirical studies have linked spiritual struggles to a variety of negative outcomes (see Pargament et al., 2005 for review). For instance, questions and doubts about religious dogma have been tied to more depression and anxiety, as well as less happiness and life satisfaction. Feelings of anger toward or alienation from God have been associated with poorer recovery following a medical illness, depression, anxiety, more symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and thoughts of suicide. Spiritual struggles have even been predictive of a greater risk of mortality. In a two-year longitudinal study of over 500 medically ill, elderly, hospitalized patients, my colleagues and I found that divine struggles were associated with a 22% to 33% greater risk of dying over the two-year period, even after controlling for confounding variables. Spiritual struggles are not without risk, these studies seem to say.

These findings might come as a surprise to spiritually-minded people. After all, spiritual struggles have been depicted by many religious figures as pathways to growth. Saint John of the Cross, for example, described spiritual struggles as a “dark night of the soul” that were brought forth by God as a natural part of spiritual development. He spoke of the “dark night of the soul” this way: “the Divine assails the soul in order to renew it and thus to make it Divine.... As a result of this, the soul feels itself to be perishing and melting away, in the presence and sight of its miseries, in a cruel spiritual death.... For in this sepulcher of dark death it must abide until the spiritual resurrection which it hopes for.”

In fact, empirical studies offer some support for the point of view of Saint John of the Cross. Several researchers have found that people who undergo spiritual struggles are more likely to report personal growth and positive spiritual transformation (see Pargament et al., 2005 for a review). For example, college students who reported that they had experienced a sacred violation (i.e., desecration) in a romantic relationship also reported more growth following the trauma (e.g., new priorities in life, greater self-reliance) and spiritual growth (e.g., more closeness to God, enhanced spirituality). In a study of members of churches that were close to the site of the Oklahoma City bombing, higher levels of spiritual struggle were also linked with greater stress-related growth. And medically ill, elderly

patients who voiced more spiritual struggles also reported greater spiritual growth.

Taken as a whole, empirical studies suggest that spiritual struggles represent a fork in the road, one that can lead to distress, pain, and decline in one direction or to growth and positive spiritual transformation in the other. A critical question follows.

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES LEAD TO GROWTH OR DECLINE

Spirituality is a rich, multidimensional process. People can take diverse spiritual pathways to any number of spiritual destinations, and both pathways and destinations can change over the course of an individual's life. Not all searches for the sacred are equal, however. I believe it is useful to distinguish between well-integrated and poorly integrated spirituality. By spiritual integration, I am referring to the degree to which spiritual beliefs, practices, experiences, relationships, and goals are organized into a coherent whole. Whether spiritual struggles lead to growth or decline, I believe, depends on whether the individual has a well-integrated or poorly integrated spirituality. Let's consider four elements of spiritual integration: broad and deep vs. thin and narrow spiritual pathways; large gods vs. small gods; flexible vs. inflexible spirituality; and religious support vs. religious stigma.

BROAD AND DEEP VS. THIN AND NARROW SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS

We live in a culture that places paramount value on the individual and the right to choose one's own way in life. This value manifests itself in a general wariness toward institutions of all kinds—marital, political, judicial, educational, and religious. In the spiritual realm, this individuality often expresses itself in a “go-it-alone” or “cafeteria-style” approach in which the person picks and chooses from a smorgasbord of options within a religious tradition or between religious traditions. While this cafeteria-style approach may satisfy the appetites of some people, it may leave others spiritually malnourished. In our culture, we find people who lack spiritual depth and breadth: people who focus on their own personal fulfillment to the exclusion of concerns for the spiritual well-being of others; people who engage in hollow rituals disconnected from feelings of spiritual uplift and awe, and people who have created their own theologies that are disconnected from the wisdom of great spiritual teachers, past and present.

Spiritual struggles represent a fork in the road, one that can lead to distress, pain, and decline in one direction or to growth and positive spiritual transformation in the other.

William James described one type of spiritual narrowness. In his classic work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James distinguished healthy-minded from sick-souled religious individuals. The “healthy-minded,” he said, are able to see life in purely positive terms. However, he was not a big fan of healthy-mindedness. In minimizing and even denying the problems of pain and suffering in the world, James argued, the healthy-minded are vulnerable to problems when they encounter the darker side of life. Ultimately, he wrote, healthy-minded religion is incomplete “because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth” (p. 160). The sick-souled, on the other hand, have a broader and deeper spirituality. True, they must grapple with pain and suffering, yet they are better equipped to confront the full range of life's challenges.

LARGE GODS VS. SMALL GODS

Unfortunately, religious education often comes to a close just when it should be beginning. For many adolescents, religious confirmation signals the end of formal religious education. And yet, this is just the time when young adults have developed the capacity to replace child-like conceptions of divinity with more sophisticated spiritual understandings that are better suited to the complexities of adult life. This premature closure leaves many people with a “small gods” understanding of the sacred that cannot shed light on the profound problems of life.

J. B. Phillips describes many of these “small gods” in his book, *Your God is Too Small*. He talks about the Grand Old Man “who was a great power in His day, but who could not possibly be expected to keep pace with

Spiritual struggles may have a more positive outcome if they are met with empathy, support, and guidance rather than stigma.

modern progress” (p. 24); the god of Absolute Perfection who insists on complete and total loyalty and flawless performance; the Heavenly Bosom who provides limitless solace and comfort without ever asking for anything in return; and the Resident Policeman who serves as the “nagging internal voice that at worst spoils our pleasure and at best keeps us rather negatively on the path of virtue” (p. 15). These limited representations of the sacred cannot deal with the full spectrum of human potential and the full range of life challenges. For instance, people with an overly strict conscience often view God as a “Resident Policeman” who frowns upon enjoyable experiences in life and spoils moments of pleasure with the threat of ultimate punishment. But small gods are not limited to punitive beings. People who see the sacred as purely loving and protective may also face disappointment and disillusionment, for they may be unable to reconcile their small, albeit positive, representation of the sacred with their experiences of pain, suffering, and evil in the world.

FLEXIBILITY VS. INFLEXIBILITY

Flexibility involves the ability to change one’s spiritual beliefs, practices, relationships, experiences, and goals in response to changes within oneself and the larger environment. This kind of flexibility is not inconsistent with deep religious commitment. In fact, a few studies by Daniel McIntosh and his colleagues have shown that people who are both highly religiously committed *and* spiritually flexible show fewer physical symptoms, greater well-being, and better life adjustment. Conversely, spiritual inflexibility bodes less well, particularly for people in the midst of spiritual struggles. In our two-year study of medically ill, hospitalized, elderly patients, my colleagues and I were able to compare four groups of survivors in terms of their physical health, mental health, and spiritual well-

being: those who reported no spiritual struggles at baseline or follow-up (non-strugglers), those who reported spiritual struggles at either baseline or follow-up alone (two groups of acute strugglers), and those who reported spiritual struggles at both baseline and follow-up (chronic strugglers). Of the four groups, the chronic spiritual strugglers were at greatest risk for declines in health and well-being over the two years. These were, we believe, the people who “got stuck” in their struggles. They were unable to resolve or work their struggles through and, as a result, they suffered the greatest problems.

RELIGIOUS SUPPORT VS. RELIGIOUS STIGMA

The experience of spiritual struggles may be accompanied by feelings of guilt and shame. For example, in one study of African American men in homeless shelters, C. Smith and J. J. Exline reported that 46% believed that negative feelings toward God were unacceptable (in a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, IL, August, 2002). Some religious groups can exacerbate these feelings of shame and guilt by condemning those who voice spiritual questions and doubts. In this vein, one woman responded to the introduction of evolution into a university’s curriculum with a letter in which she wrote: “If her [daughter’s] faith is shattered or shaken, I’d rather see her dead” (on a PBS program “What About God?” narrated by L. Nesson, WGBH Video, 2001).

On the other hand, spiritual struggles may have a more positive outcome if they are met with empathy, support, and guidance rather than stigma. Let’s return to the story of Tony Hendra. Feeling desperate and desolate following his dream of divine abandonment, Tony seeks out Father Joe, a kindly monk who had served as Tony’s priest and counselor. Father Joe does not challenge or discount Tony’s experience, but counsels him not to confuse his feelings with a larger reality. “You may not feel your love, but God is still your loved one, your other,” Father Joe says (p. 99). He then offers a powerful reframing of Tony’s night of anguish.

God gave you a great gift that terrible night, Tony dear. He gave you a vision of Hell. Not that silly fire-and-brimstone stuff. True Hell. Being alone with your self for all eternity. Only your own self to hope in, only your own self to love.... As you said, a p-p-prison with no door. I don’t think that vision will ever come to you

again. You must never forget it (p. 100).

With the help of Father Joe's reframing, Tony is able to grow from his spiritual struggle, extending and deepening his understanding of God, faith, and the purpose of his life. Tony leaves Father Joe with these thoughts:

My descent into Hell had forced me to consider the deeper nature of what I professed to believe, the life I wished to choose. For a year I'd basked in my faith as if it were no more my responsibility than a fine spell of weather. Now I had to fight for it, dig deeper foundations, prove how much it meant to me.

Thinking I'd been engulfed by darkness, I'd instead found enlightenment and strength of purpose. The way ahead would be a steeper, stonier path that led to grimmer, tougher places, the real world, hard issues, as it was really lived. There would be more tests, more doubts. But doubts were normal, even to be embraced. By questioning where you stood, you moved forward (pp. 100-101).

What determines whether spiritual struggles lead to growth or decline? Hopefully, with further research, we will soon have a clear answer to this question. Here, I have suggested that the answer may depend on whether the individual follows broad and deep rather than thin and narrow spiritual pathways, whether the individual devotes him/herself to a large rather than small god, whether the individual is spiritually flexible rather than inflexible, and whether the individual encounters spiritual support rather than stigma in response to his/her struggles.

Remember that people who "get stuck" in their struggles are at greatest risk for declines in their health and well-being, so it is important to identify people who are struggling before these struggles become chronic. Hospital chaplain George Fitchett advocates actively screening people at "spiritual risk" in healthcare settings. In one study of 200 newly admitted medical and surgery patients, he and his colleagues found that those who were high in need of spiritual intervention were less likely to request spiritual assistance in comparison to those with less need. In an article in 1999 Fitchett recommends brief screening questions about anger at God, fear of punishment by God, disappointments in faith or religious institutions, and lifetime changes in the importance of spiritual or religious faith, to determine whether an in-depth spiritual assessment and spiritually-oriented counseling may be warranted.

God, he says, is big enough to listen to all of an individual's feelings, negative as well as positive.

NORMALIZE SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES

Remember that spiritual struggles are a source of guilt and shame for many people. And yet, spiritual struggles are a natural part of life. People respond with relief and gratitude when the struggles they voice are met with understanding and acceptance rather than threat and rebuke. George Zornow, a Lutheran pastor, has responded to the need for open talk about spiritual struggles by developing a program called "Crying Out to God," unfortunately unpublished. The program is designed to help people address their feelings of abandonment, anger, and isolation in their relationships with God. Based on the psalms of lament, "Crying Out to God" encourages people to restore their connection with God by voicing all of their emotions to the divine. God, he says, is big enough to listen to all of an individual's feelings, negative as well as positive. Zornow himself models this openness by expressing some of his own spiritual struggles. By normalizing spiritual struggles, providing a spiritual model who describes his own struggles openly and honestly, and creating opportunities for others to talk about their spiritual struggles, Zornow's program may encourage many people to move beyond the guilt, shame, and silence that surrounds their own struggles.

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES TO ADDRESS SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES

If spirituality can be a problem at times, it can also be a source of solutions. Spiritually-minded psychologists have developed several approaches to helping people resolve spiritual struggles by broadening and deepening their spiritual pathways and understandings of the sacred (see Pargament et al., 2005). Consider three examples.

Nichole Murray-Swank, one of my doctoral students at Bowling Green University, developed an eight-

Picture God as a waterfall within you... pouring down cool, refreshing water...

session spiritually-integrated program, "Solace for the Soul," to address the spiritual struggles of women who had been sexually abused as children, often by a family member or neighbor. Many of these women, Murray-Swank noted, suffer from harsh, controlling images of God. "Solace for the Soul" encourages these women to see God in a more loving light. In one exercise, she asks these women to imagine God's love as a waterfall within themselves:

Picture God as a waterfall within you... pouring down cool, refreshing water... the waters of love, healing, restoration throughout your body... a cool, refreshing waterfall washing down over your head, your face, your shoulders, your neck, out through your arms, down your legs, out through your toes, refreshing, bringing life, quenching thirst... renewing, refreshing, restoring.

Murray-Swank also provides her clients with prayers that speak of God and spirituality in ways that are freeing rather than restricting, and hopeful rather than dark. Here is one from a survivor of sexual abuse:

I reach deep inside to find what is the heart of me.
Giver of Life, I celebrate the life you've given me.
I reject the pictures of destruction that so often fill my mind.

I celebrate the love you've given me.
I reject the pictures of hate that threaten to overwhelm all that I am.

I celebrate the body that you have given me.
I reject the fear that has paralyzed this body.
The baby body that I had wasn't ready for the adult that hurt me

Now I work to let my grown up body know that it's OK, that I

Can be completely in my body and be me.
God of all that is physical and all that is spiritual,
Help me see the connection, and heal, and rejoice.

I celebrate your gifts.

Amen.

In a second example, Burke and Cullen developed a group intervention for Christian women struggling with post-abortion guilt, grief, and spiritual isolation. This intervention uses ritual, spiritual imagery, discussion, prayer, and "Living Scripture" to facilitate the spiritual healing of abortion-related spiritual struggles. In Living Scripture participants are asked to imagine themselves as characters in various Biblical stories. For example, in one session, the leader asks participants to visualize that they are the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:4-30): "You are the women carrying the water jug up to the well. You're feeling burdened. The weight of the earthen jug presses down on your shoulders. Your back and neck ache under the pressure. . . Jesus looks deep into your eyes. He tells you about your life, where you've come from, who you've been with, what you're like. Jesus knows everything about you" (pp. 63-64). Another exercise focuses on developing a spiritual relationship with an aborted child through a spiritual imagery exercise whereby the mother encounters Christ with the child and experiences reconciliation.

In a third example, Jack Kornfeld has written a meditation to help people reach greater peace in themselves, not by fighting to eliminate their inner struggles but by accepting them as part of who they are.

Sit comfortably for a few minutes, letting your body be at rest. Let your breathing be easy and natural. Bring your attention into the present, sit quietly, and notice whatever sensations are present in your body....

Then cast your attention over all the battles that still exist in your life. Sense them inside yourself.... If you have been fighting inner wars with your feelings ... sense the struggle you have been waging. Notice the struggles in your thoughts as well. Be aware of how you have carried on the inner battles. Notice the inner armies, the inner dictators, the inner fortifications. Be aware of all that you have fought within yourself....

Gently, with openness, allow each of these experiences to be present. Simply notice each of them in turn with interest and kind attention. In each area of struggle, let your body, heart, and soul be soft. Open to whatever you experience without fighting. Let it be present

just as it is. Let go of the battle. Breathe quietly and let yourself be at rest. Invite all parts of yourself to join you at the peace table in your heart. (p. 30).

ANTICIPATE SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES BEFORE THEY OCCUR

Finally, it is important to consider how people might be better equipped to anticipate spiritual struggles and draw on their spiritual resources *before* they encounter serious problems. Religious education may be particularly valuable in this respect. Through improvements in religious education, children and adolescents could be taught how to understand and cope with the spiritual struggles they are likely to face in their lives in ways that are consistent with their religious traditions. Adults too have much to gain from programs that help them anticipate the nature of spiritual doubt, conflicts with the church, and struggles with the divine. Spiritual educators and leaders could provide an important service to their larger community by acknowledging and addressing spiritual struggles, as a normal and potentially valuable dimension of spiritual experience. By strengthening spiritual resources, recognizing the reality of spiritual struggles, and assisting people in the process of resolving these struggles, religious communities may be able to help people grow rather than decline through their own dark nights of the soul.

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Kenneth I. Pargament, Ph.D., is a professor of clinical psychology at Bowling Green State University. He has been a leading figure in the effort to bring a more balanced view of religious life to the attention of social scientists, and has published extensively on the vital role of religion in coping with stress and trauma.

A Spirituality of stress Management



Linda Amadeo, M.S. and Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.

This article is based on a talk given at the Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver on June 16-17, 2006.

Stress is everywhere. It is so pervasive that one cannot go through a day without hearing some reference to stress either on television, radio, daily newspapers or the Internet. More than thirty years ago, Arnold A. Mitchell of the Stanford Research Institute observed: "Stress is a major problem in the contemporary United States. It negatively affects the daily lives of scores of millions of Americans. It causes a bewildering array of physiological, psychological, and social malfunctions. On an economic level, the effects of stress probably cost the nation over \$100 billion annually. Moreover, available evidence suggests that stress-related maladies are on the rise." Not much has changed today.

STRESS

What are we talking about when we speak of stress? In the first issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT magazine (Spring, 1980) James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., wrote:

We need some terms and concepts if we are to come to grips with this formidable, ubiquitous foe. Unfortunately, the word

stress has come to be used in a vague and sloppy fashion during recent years perhaps because the vast literature on the subject stems from many and diverse disciplines, primarily psychiatry, clinical and social psychology, cultural anthropology, and occupational and internal medicine, with significant contributions from such widely different fields as behavioral toxicology and personnel management. Each of these disciplines is concerned with what are generally termed psychosocial stresses.”

Selye’s way of conceptualizing stress was not as something outside the body but rather as something in an individual’s body.

Hans Selye first published his Nobel prize-winning findings on the topic of stress and the physiologic effects of stress on the body in the July 4, 1936, edition of *Nature*. He borrowed the term stress from engineers and physicists who had used the term to describe enough force being applied to an object or system to distort or deform it. He defined a stressor as any agent that causes stress to an organism. Selye’s way of conceptualizing stress was not as something outside the body but rather as something in an individual’s body, namely a specific set of biological conditions that occurs when an event or situation has an impact on a person and requires an adaptation of some sort.

Since the time of his original article, a number of definitions of stress have evolved. The most commonly accepted definition of stress (mainly attributed to Richard S. Lazarus, Ph.D.) is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. Lazarus locates stress inside the person rather than in the environment.

When a person experiences a threat, a whole series of physiologic events takes place in the body. Adrenaline and other hormones are secreted, causing increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure and stepped-up blood cell production; digestion shuts down; blood is shunted to the long muscles of the arms and legs; blood clots more quickly; pupils dilate, and the body is prepared to fight or flee. The body’s reaction to stress is much like throwing an electric switch in a huge room with many overhead lights causing each light fixture to turn on simultaneously. When a person feels threatened and under stress, all the glands of the body react by shooting hormones into the blood stream that prepare a person to be ready to fight or take flight.

All of us know people who describe themselves as

being under a lot of stress. Stress comes from our perceptions of the world around us when things may not be what we expect. This lack of agreement with our expectations can create stress. For example, we went into a coffee shop for a cup of coffee in the days when coffee was brewed in a pot. The young man at the shop said that the coffee was not ready, but that the pot should be done in a few minutes. We decided to wait. Another customer, apparently in a big hurry, demanded that he get his coffee now. The man’s demands had no effect on how quickly the coffee dripped into the pot. It just went drip, drip, drip. The man left the shop loudly vowing never to return. Apparently he expected that the coffee should be ready when he was; he felt that he was too busy to wait, that he had a right to expect fresh coffee. Perhaps some of his beliefs are true, but the coffee pot functioned as it was designed to, drip by drip. His stress was evident to all present in the shop.

Often we know when others are experiencing stress by the way they act. People under stress frequently behave in ways that are abrupt, mean, and angry. This causes a reaction on the part of others, and a vicious cycle begins.

A good indicator of stress is a measure of what Dr. Meyer Friedman, the Type A Behavior expert, called the AIAI score in daily life. AIAI stands for angry, impatient, aggressive, or irritable behavior. Paying attention to how often we experience and exhibit these behaviors is a good indicator of the amount of stress we experience each day. Bodies can break down under stress. Our organs are vulnerable to it. Depending on our family history, too much stress may cause one person a heart attack and another person severe arthritis, another gastric reflux disease, or migraine headaches, or stroke, or some other stress-related illness.

Now, the question arises, how do I get rid of these harmful juices that are circulating in my body?

Presumably, all people have ways of dealing with the stresses in their lives. Some methods are healthier than others. There are a number of stress-reducing exercises available for those willing to explore the literature. Whatever works best for you is what we recommend. Perhaps it is physical exercise, or yoga, or quiet prayer. Each of us needs a relief valve to help us get rid of stress. Some pressure relievers, suggested by Edward R. Dayton, are:

- Staying ahead of your work
- Doing hard things first
- Doing difficult tasks in phases
- Getting enough sleep
- Having planned recreation and hobbies
- Admitting and verbalizing the causes for your own irritations, and
- Facing up to the fact you really cannot do all things.

Spiritual direction and devising a spirituality of stress management are also recommended.

Some of the most helpful suggestions for stress reduction can be found in a book written by Dr. Meyer Friedman, et al, entitled *Treating Type A Behavior and Your Heart*. In this book, Dr. Friedman encourages us to:

- Learn to be patient
- Discover how to enjoy waiting in the longest line (by remembering pleasant past events)
- Deal constructively with anger
- Acknowledge we are not always right
- Learn to say, "I could be wrong"
- Stop and smell the roses
- Be less competitive

TOWARD A SPIRITUALITY OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

In our chaotic world there is a need to integrate spirituality into ways of coping with stress. The goal is not to remove all stress; we could not if we tried. Selye began his classic work on stress with the reminder: "The absence of stress is death." What is needed today is a spirituality that embraces stress and helps us to become holy and whole despite it.

We have found it helpful to identify the sources of stress in your life. We suggest you make a mental list. Then consider these questions:

- *How well do you think you are coping with these stresses?*
- *What kinds of things do you do to diminish stress in your life?*

Most, if not all, stress comes from what we believe, or our patterns of thinking. We are not speaking of religious beliefs here, but things we think are true, or have been taught are true. For example, we may believe that there is a right way, and only one right way—usually "my way"—of doing everything. Picture a person behind the wheel of a car who liberally criticizes other drivers. This is an illustration of an inner belief causing stress.

EXPECTATIONS

One of the major causes of stress is unrealistic expectations of oneself. It is not the expectations that others have of us that cause stress. The expectations of others are stressors. Other people's expectations of us only result in stress when we internalize those expectations and use them as a template for evaluating ourselves. Those who use the evaluations of others as the criteria for judging their own sense of self-worth have an inordinate need to please others. As a result they are prone to place excessive expectations on themselves, resulting in high levels of stress.

A twenty-year longitudinal study using a psychological test called the 16 PF found that the more than seventeen hundred priests who were studied were different than other single men in one significant way. Priests were discovered to be more tender-minded. Tender-minded individuals tend to be kind, gentle and compassionate, but they also have an inordinate need to be appreciated and valued by others and, therefore, are prone to live their lives with an excessive desire to please others. Of course, this makes priests prime candidates for stress as they attempt to live up to the expectations of others. Priests are not the only tender-minded people; the category fits many people in our society today, especially those engaged in ministry. People are very vulnerable to stress when the criterion for judging self-worth is outside themselves.

In our work with people in ministry, whether laity, clergy or religious, we are discovering that expectations are increasing and the level of stress and burnout is skyrocketing. Unless something changes soon, these levels of stress will continue to have deleterious effects on these individuals and their ability to accomplish the mission of Christ.

Perfectionistic people, because of their unrealistic expectations, are prime candidates for stress. However, others are also vulnerable, such as individuals in mid-management roles caught between the expectations of

those who are above them in the hierarchical order and those whom they attempt to serve. Many people in ministry would fit this bill. James Gill once listed the characteristics of those most likely to experience stress. The list included those who:

- Always seek to be in control of situations
- Constantly seek approval
- Resist criticism
- Have difficulty setting limits
- Retain anger

SPIRITUALITY

One of the major ways of managing stress, regardless of the cause, is to develop a spirituality of stress management. Once at a workshop in Ireland we noticed this prayer posted on the bulletin board:

“Listen in deep silence.

Be still and open your mind and heart and soul.

Sink deep into the peace that awaits you,

Beyond the frantic riotous thoughts

And sights and sounds of the insane world.”

While we understand the sentiments being conveyed in this prayer, that only God can bring us full peace, there was something disquieting about the prayer. It's underlying message seemed to be that the world is bad. Yet, most of us spend the majority of our waking hours in the midst of the insane world. It is almost impossible to escape the noise, chaos and frenetic pace of the world because our family, job, community and vocation place great demands upon us. Christians are not called to escape the world but rather to embrace it, with all its good and with all its stress. The challenge is to find ways to sacramentalize those stress-filled times: to develop a spirituality that finds God in the midst of stress and chaos.

Parker Palmer, a Quaker and spiritual writer, has clearly articulated this need to find God in the midst of stress. He says:

Contemporary images of what it means to be spiritual tend to value the inward search over the outward act, silence over sound, solitude over interaction, centeredness and quietude and balance over engagement and animation and struggle. If one is called to the monastic life, those images can be empowering. But if one is called to the world of action, the same images can disenfranchise the soul, for they

The challenge is to find ways to sacramentalize those stress-filled times: to develop a spirituality that finds God in the midst of stress and chaos.

tend to devalue the energies of active life rather than encourage us to move with those energies toward wholeness. (*The Active Life: Wisdom of Work, Creativity and Caring*. Harper San Francisco, 1991.)

Palmer offers an understanding of spirituality that runs against the norm of what is often proposed. His understanding challenges us to embrace and value the God found in the midst of our stressful existences, mindful that the vocation for most people calls them to be in the world, not in the monastery.

This model of embracing the world does not deny the need for locating moments for contemplation. However, it invites us to a broadened appreciation of the God who is present in every activity of our lives, including the stressful ones.

Perhaps, in the midst of stress, we are being invited to discover new ways of praying. We met a woman who was affirmed by her peers as a deeply spiritual woman. She had six children, three of whom had muscular dystrophy. While visiting her, we became aware that the needs of her children left her virtually no time for herself; yet she did not appear to be stressed. We asked her to share her secret with us. It is hard to be spiritual unless one takes time to develop a personal relationship with God, but she seemed to have no time. Her secret, she revealed, is that she steals moments in the course of the day. Maybe that is the essence of a stress management spirituality; to learn to steal moments when minutes and hours are impossible.

In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* Pope John Paul II declared that Christianity is not only a religion of knowledge and contemplation, but also a religion of action, of God's action and our action. It is in the midst of that action that we often encounter stress. The pope called us to a lived spirituality, an active spirituality.

This is the same term that is used by the U.S. bishops in *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*. They remind us that every baptized person is called to holiness and spirituality, and they describe that spirituality as an active spirituality. They equate it with a living of the beatitudes. Anyone who attempts to live the beatitudes daily is bound to experience stress. What does a stressed spiritual person look like?

One of our favorite spiritual authors is Father Ronald Rolheiser. He offers an image of what a non-spiritual, stressed person looks like: a person who has lost all zest for living. Conversely, his image of a stressed, but spiritual, person is one whose zest for life continues. Stressed spiritual people radiate the joy and life of Christ in the midst of the stress.

We were recently introduced to a bishop who served as secretary to Popes Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II. He shared the one incident that seemed to have made the greatest impact on him. Once, a young transitional deacon was introduced to Pope Paul, who shared this thought with him. He said, "Your role as a priest, a leader in the Church, is to radiate joy." That injunction could be extended to anyone who claims to be a Christian.

While some people only find God in the good and the pleasant, deeply spiritual people, infused with an incarnational spirituality, find God in everything, even in stress. A friend of ours reported that his doctor recently informed him that he might lose his sight, a truly stressful situation. As he reflected on that possibility, our friend was able to discover God speaking to him through this potential tragedy. He and his wife would frequently say that someday they would take a trip to Ireland or do something else that they had always dreamed of doing. Reflection on his stressful situation led him to the realization that there might not be a someday. He began to look for beauty in the everyday things around him, and in each moment of the day. His stress became the catalyst for learning to live more fully in the present.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We would like to offer a few ideas for living a spirituality of stress management.

- Remember, the goal is not to remove all stress, but rather to learn how to manage and learn from stress.

- Identify habits, attitudes and behaviors that cause stress, and learn how to stop causing distress to oneself.
- Begin from the realization that stressors do not have to automatically cause debilitating stress. We have control over them, because we choose how to interpret them.
- Keep the locus of response to stress within oneself and do not give that power over to others. We can choose how to react to stressors.
- Develop a spirituality of stress management by embracing those stressful moments in life, and search for and embrace the God who is present in the midst of that stress.
- Practice stress-reduction techniques, such as deep breathing, quick mental prayers, and physical exercises like head rolls and shoulder shrugs.
- To gain control of a stressful situation, ask yourself these questions:
 - Is there a way for me to change the situation?*
 - If not, do I have to continue to be in the situation?*
 - If I need to be in the situation, can I change my perceptions of it?*
 - Can I learn to accept that this is the way it is?*
 - Can I relax my body before being in the situation so that I am relaxed?* (Just as it is impossible to be hungry and full at the same time, or awake and asleep at the same time, it is impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time.)
- See everything that happens in life as a potential gift from God. As Gandhi said: "My imperfections and my failures are as much a blessing from God as my successes and talents, and I lay them both at God's feet."

We have found over the years that developing a spirituality of stress management is not an easy task. Expect failures at times, but be willing to try again. Over time, we can learn better responses to stress; we can find God in the midst of trying events. The results—a healthier mind, body and soul—are worth the effort.

Cultivate Awe... Harvest Justice

Part I

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

These two articles are based on talks given at the Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver on June 16-17, 2006.



There are many approaches we might take in considering the relationships that exist among ecology, spirituality, and health. As so many facets are worth our consideration, I decided to divide our topic into two articles. The first will be dedicated to a consideration of spirituality and liturgical practice from an ecological perspective. The second article, *Cultivate Awe...Harvest Justice Part II*, will examine the image of God from an earth-friendly perspective and consider the ethics that follow from this view. Each article stands alone, but both, I hope, will help us to reflect on and develop or enhance a spirituality that has potential to heal divisions that exist at a variety of levels within ourselves and between the larger earth community and us.

AWE AND WONDER

As we move into this initial article, I want to share some thoughts on my decision to call it *Cultivate Awe*. Awe, or, as it is sometimes

As Thomas Berry tells us, the Great Work of the 21st century requires that we learn to live in harmony with the earth in order to save it and ourselves from destruction.

called, wonder, is a feeling or mood of astonishment or amazement that wells up in us when we have a heightened experience of or an awareness of *being* or reality. Psychologists and other researchers, among them Paul Pearsall, are currently exploring dimensions of awe in an effort to shift our focus from psychopathology to healthier emotions that reflect our essential relatedness to each other and to our world.

In reference to the earth or cosmos awe refers to our experiencing the mystery of life and, often enough, sensing the inclusion of everything, ourselves as well as others, within that encompassing mysterious reality. This sort of awe or experience of wonder also tends to contain a recognition of radical dependence on the mysterious ground of being that leads to a sense of humility. Humility, which is derived from the word *humus*, meaning earth, teaches us our place in the cosmos—a place that is simultaneously immense and insignificant. And, added to all this, awe or wonder often contains a sense of gratitude or thankfulness that I am, that the earth is, that the world or cosmos exists, that all is gift. And from our sense of awe or wonder comes an urge to live in the light of earth's gift, to live with awareness rather than to go through life with blinders on, only half awake. A lovely small verse from a longer work, *Duck at Sea*, by Thomas S. Jones captures this:

Tonight, Eternity alone is near;
The sea, the sunset, and the darkening blue;
Within their shelter is no space for fear –
Only the wonder that such things are true.
Perhaps you have experienced such awe or wonder and can recall the experience now.

Without this sense of awe and wonder and the love of our earth that it inspires, we are unlikely to come to

health of mind, body or spirit. We certainly will be less inclined to work toward a healthy, humble integration of ourselves within the larger earth community. If we are to foster the growth of an ecological spirituality, we must encourage those to whom we minister through education programs, retreats and liturgy to develop this sense of awe that is, in its essence, a mystical approach to life. We need to assist our congregations to experience with their hearts the great mystery of Creation and Life itself—the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that Rudolph Otto offered as his definition of the holy or sacred reality. We have no inclination to do the work required to save what we do not love, and, as Thomas Berry tells us, the Great Work of the 21st century requires that we learn to live in harmony with the earth in order to save it and ourselves from destruction.

A BREATHING EXERCISE

Before we go further, I would invite you to join me in a very simple breathing exercise. Focusing our attention on the breath, we honor the invisible but essential gift of air, the *ruah Yahweh* that is always on the move, flowing around our earth and within our bodies. By closing our eyes and concentrating on the inflow and outflow of breath we bring ourselves into harmony with the basic rhythm of life. We enter into ourselves and connect with our personal souls and with the soul of the universe. Let us ask pardon for the times we have fouled the air around us through our belching smokestacks that spew debris into earth's atmosphere. Let us also be thankful for the gift of trees whose leaves absorb our own waste product, carbon dioxide, and return to us the gift of pure oxygen.

As we continue to focus on our breath pray with me this Zuni chant that captures the recognition of the importance of the breath:

Beseeching the breath of the divine one,
His life-giving breath,
His breath of old-age,
His breath of waters,
His breath of seeds,
His breath of riches,
His breath of fecundity,
His breath of power,
His breath of all good fortune,
Asking for his breath
And into my warm body drawing his breath,
I add to your breath

That happily you may always live.

(*Earth Prayers From Around the World*, Roberts, E., & Amidon, E. [Eds.], p. 161.)

One of the delights of cultivating an eco-spirituality is a renewed appreciation of Creation. All of us, perhaps particularly those of us who are city-dwellers, tend to overlook the beauty, the mystery of life that is offered to us every day. It is so easy for us to get caught up in a world that is dominated by machines and human-made artifacts. In our rushed day, we seldom take the time to offer praise and gratitude for the world in which we exist—and for the very fact that the world and we actually do exist. This rushed existence is definitely not good for our health. Our physical, mental and spiritual lives suffer when we alienate ourselves from the elemental rhythms of the earth.

DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS

Recently I came across a book entitled *Last Child in the Woods—Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*. The author, Richard Louv, argues that today's children do not spend nearly enough time enjoying the beauty of the outdoors. He relates this deficit to issues of childhood obesity, childhood depression, and attention deficit disorder. He observed that the sense of wonder is lost when children are not exposed to nature. And, he adds, nature does not have to be Yosemite. It can be an empty neighborhood lot or one's own backyard. Having observed my neighbor's daughter discover grass, I can attest to the amazed joy children experience when allowed to explore the natural world.

Psychologists have also begun to take interest in the non-human factors that play a significant role in the formation and sustenance of an individual's personality. They are investigating such factors as the presence of animals, the topography and climate of a person's physical environment, population density, and sense of time in order to learn more about healthy personality development and the role such factors play in various forms of mental disorder. The relationship between the long, cold, dark winter months of northern Europe, Alaska or Siberia and the incidence of depression and alcoholism in the population has been documented. Earth-oriented therapies, such as horticulture therapy, are sometimes used to inspire hope. For example, one might have people plant a seed or bulb that brings forth a flower. Horticulture therapy is also useful in teaching us about and reconciling us to

the cycle of life—reducing our tendency to deny death and its role in our development.

Developing an eco-spirituality invites us to adopt a contemplative gaze, to see deeply into the ordinary manifestations of life that surround us, and to experience a sense of awe. Too often we are more interested in scanning our environment, looking for signs of danger or for things that we might turn to our advantage. We need to slow ourselves down a bit, learn to look, or, as older versions of scripture invite us, "Behold!" and really see what is around us: the sky, the beautiful Front Range, a blade of grass, or a flower. We need to adopt the loving gaze of the mystic or the poet so that we come "To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,/ Hold Infinity in the palm of (y)our hand/ And Eternity in an hour," as William Blake put it in "Auguries of Innocence."

BIBLICAL VIEWS BEYOND DOMINANCE/SUBMISSION

A number of environmentalists have argued that Biblical-based religious groups, both Jewish and Christian, have contributed to the ecological problems we face today by fostering an attitude of dominance/subjectation as our way of relating to non-human creation. The authors of *The Earth Bible* have examined the evidence and agree that the Bible certainly reflects a patriarchal world-view in many areas. However, they also found sections, particularly the image of Wisdom found in the biblical wisdom literature, which were definitely earth-friendly and might be used to foster a love of the earth.

Diarmuid O'Murchu also refers to Lady Wisdom, or as he prefers to call her, the Wisdom Woman (*Evolutionary Faith*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002, pp. 70-71). He notes that, above all else, the Wisdom Woman is a force for connection and relationship. Her connections extend to every part of reality. She is closely joined to the created world; she is a friend of God; she delights in the company of human beings. She exists in reality as if it were a tapestry of connected threads, patterned into an intricate whole of which she is the center. Her aliveness thrives on her ability to link with others across the spectrum of personal, planetary, and cosmic reality. Her wisdom arises from and contributes to the generic sense of mutuality. And, he notes further, Wisdom defines God's Spirit as a persuading, inviting, communicating agency, acting not merely in human interests but for the sake of the whole of cosmic reality.

Because the Bible is still the most widely read book in the world, despite the fact that it sometimes presents negative images of the earth, biblically-based religious institutions have the potential to take a leadership role in environmental issues. If we were to teach our members to read Scripture with ecological eyes and to see spirituality in ecological terms, emphasizing the great blessing of Creation rather than focusing on the Fall of Adam and Eve, we would have a built-in infrastructure for expanding ecological awareness and practice. If we were to ask the Holy Spirit to infuse us with the gift of Holy Awe—and cultivate that sense of awe in our congregations—we would live the wisdom of loving kindness. Then compassionate love, the womb-love of God for creation, would be manifest in our care for the earth just as it is in our care for our fellow humans.

I was encouraged to see that the National Council of Churches has dedicated 2006 to protecting wilderness areas. Noting that wilderness played a significant role in the spiritual development of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, the Council's Public Lands Stewardship Initiative plans to develop a theological reflection on the importance of undeveloped lands and urges its constituent congregations to lobby to protect wilderness areas. In the Council's view "(w)ild lands are the connective tissue that holds together the glorious web of life by providing space for wildlife and undisturbed natural cycles."

I recommend Ellen Bernstein's book *The Splendor of Creation: A Biblical Ecology* that seeks to harmonize the Creation account in Genesis with rabbinical and Kabbalist teachings, with her environmental studies, and with her work as a high school biology teacher. While working with her students, Ms. Bernstein realized that offering only scientific information was insufficient to instill in them a realization of the preciousness of nature and to establish a genuine connection with the earth that would motivate them to love and care for nature. As a result, Ms. Bernstein dropped traditional textbooks and replaced them with material gathered from great nature writers. She also revisited the Genesis account and discovered a variety of ecospiritual themes embedded there: the mystery of creation, the goodness of nature, the importance of diversity and sustainability, the interdependence of all things and a sense of place, time, order and harmony.

Despite the limitations of our scriptural tradition, we need not be afraid to devote time and effort to raising ecological awareness in those to whom we minister. As theologians Richard Fragomeni and John

Pawlikowski remind us, we are not limited to biblical sources. We can also draw upon the spiritual resources of persons like Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, and Hugh of St. Victor who serve as models of those who recognized the value of the earth and practiced various forms of ecological spirituality. We have, for example, Francis' *Canticle to the Sun* in which he calls the elements of the cosmos as well as the inhabitants of the earth his sisters and brothers. Building on his sense of kinship, we are encouraged to see the earth with all its creatures, including ourselves, as companions in the community of life. And, although Francis lived in the world of the late 12th-early 13th century, his vision of our kinship with creation finds its echo in contemporary writers such as ethicist Larry Rasmussen who observed that *the* scientific discovery of the 20th century was the fact that nature is a community.

MYSTICS AND ECO-SPIRITUALITY

Benedictine abbess and visionary, Hildegard of Bingen (11th-12th centuries), equated the images of Lady Wisdom, Mother Nature, and the Virgin Mary and used them interchangeably to express *viriditas*, the *greenness* that was her image of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit that flowed through them. She also used earth-centered imagery to express her understanding of God. For example, she wrote of God:

I am the one whose praise echoes on high.

I adorn all the earth.

I am the breeze that nurtures all things green.

I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.

I am led by the spirit to feed the purest streams.

I am the rain coming from the dew

that causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life.

For Hugh of St. Victor, a 12th century Augustinian canon who directed an abbey school in Paris, symbols and sacraments were vitally important in understanding the divine activity, and the symbolism of nature and history merged in the liturgy. Water, wine, bread, salt, oil—the stuff of the natural world—became the means by which we were able to enter into communion with the divine. The sacramental character of nature was due to it being filled with God long before any particular sacramental ritual system evolved. Hugh indicated that our call is to contemplate God's wonders and to praise God's works. As our contemplative eye is opened by the healing power of Christ the Light-Wisdom, by faith and our participation in the sacra-

mental life of the Church, we receive new insight into the sacramental dimension of all created reality.

Hugh's vision of the sacramental dimension of creation offers us an opportunity for recovering a Christian understanding of the relationship that exists between the natural world and human development. His views might assist us in recognizing and preserving the interconnectedness of the environment and the human community. His belief is that the elements of the natural world, already sacramental through the act of creation, become bearers of God's grace in the Christian sacramental economy. This insight means that we need to take seriously the grace-bearing dimension of all creation. Adopting such a view offers us a perspective from which we might make a Christian response to today's ecological challenges.

MODERN WRITERS AND ECO-SPIRITUALITY

We are also blessed with a variety of modern saints, un-canonized perhaps, but holy people nevertheless, who are guiding us along the path to an ecological spirituality. One certainly worthy of mention is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This Jesuit paleontologist, known for his lyrical prose as well as his poetry, wrote with great feeling of "matter," the basic stuff of life. He was a person who linked his knowledge of science with the eye of contemplation, recognizing the presence of the divine in matter and bringing new insights to the meaning of "incarnation." Just the titles of his works: *The Divine Milieu*, *Cosmic Life*, and *The Hymn of the Universe* give us an idea of his interest in and deep commitment to the earth. He wrote that he gave praise because he came to realize that God's "creatures are not merely so linked together in solidarity that none can exist unless all the rest surround it, but that all are so dependent on a single central reality that a true life, borne in common by them all, gives them ultimately their consistence and their unity" (*The Mass on the World in The Hymn of the Universe*, New York: HarperCollins Publications, Inc., 1965, p. 25).

Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O., monk, poet, spiritual writer, and social activist, is another contemporary who came to sense and value the sacred throughout the entire range of the natural world. Named by his abbot to be the community's forester, he began to restore the woodlands around Gethsemane Abbey. Apparently this job altered his experience of solitude. Where before he had considered solitude as privacy to pursue his intellec-

The Universe's history, its groaning to give birth to something glorious, comes together in us, becomes conscious in us.

tual pursuits, he now began to experience it as an opportunity for embodied engagement with a wisdom community, silent participation in the vitality of living things.

The Celtic spirit Merton inherited from his Welsh ancestors found expression in his life of solitude within the walls of Gethsemane. Over time, he seems to have discovered the archetype of the green man within himself as he entered into the discipline of the rhythm of the elements, the seasons, and the creatures of the land he came to call home. Although he never wrote a book that was dedicated solely to his views on nature or to ecological spirituality, his writings are infused with references to the earth and cosmos. Kathleen Deignan edited his works and compiled his nature writings into a small volume *when the trees say nothing*. She invites us to share Merton's liturgies of rain and autumn and dawn so that we might discover our "thin places," places where earth's veil yields to a vision of Eden, places where we may find the sanity and refreshment that bring us true healing and vitality.

In this very brief selection from Deignan's book, Merton tells us how he came to experience himself in kinship with the earth: "In this wilderness I have learned how to sleep again. I am not alien. The trees I know, the night I know, the rain I know. I close my eyes and instantly sink into the whole rainy world of which I am a part, and the world goes on with me in it, for I am not alien to it."

Merton's sense of being at home, of belonging to the earth community, is echoed in the work of David S. Toolan, S.J. Thanks to recent discoveries in the fields of astronomy, physics, and biochemistry, he writes:

We can now understand ourselves as no longer alien intruders in the cosmos but as belonging. The Universe's history, its groaning to give birth to something glorious, comes together in us, becomes conscious in us. 'I am that,' we can now say with the Hindu Upanishads—star dust,

Our creation myth is not a scientific hypothesis
but an interpretive understanding of our lives
that tells us how to live.

earth stuff, a being literally conceived in far-off parts of the universe and seeded here on this planet to make a difference to the cosmos—this truth and its challenge defines us (Toolan, D.S., “Praying in a Post-Einsteinian Universe,” *Cross Currents*, Winter 1996-1997, pp. 462-463).

Still another person who urges us to develop or, perhaps, recover, our sense of awe as we reflect on the wonder of our earth, the garden planet of the universe, is Thomas Berry, priest and “geologist.” He has worked extensively with contemporary scientists and cosmologists such as Brian Swimme in an effort to have us move from a relationship of use of the earth to a relationship of intimacy. Berry is convinced that it is only by appreciating our earth in its wonder, beauty and full meaning that we will establish an integral relationship with the earth and attain our true flourishing while honoring the other modes of earthly being. He reminds us that we will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of the numinous presence from which all things come into being. He identifies the Great Work of the 21st century as our carrying out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans will be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.

There is also a movement on the part of scientists and theologians to open a dialogue on creation. The Templeton Foundation has fostered research in this area. Many books have been written within the past several years on such topics. For example, *Cosmology and Creation* by Paul Brockelman examines the spiritual significance of contemporary cosmology. He tells us the story of the universe, not as the beginning of creation but as a continuing creation, a creative process. He invites us to re-examine our creation myth as something that connects us to a wider reality to which we belong. Our creation myth is not a scientific hypothesis but an interpretive understanding of our lives that tells us how to live, how to walk a sacred path, how to see our

human life and the goals we seek to accomplish within the encompassing reality of which we are a part.

ECO-SPIRITUALITY AND LITURGY

How might we foster an eco-spirituality among those to whom we minister? How might we make our formal and informal liturgical life more eco-friendly? It seems that one task involves developing a language that will allow us to interpret our traditional biblical and theological understandings within the contemporary view of creation. The International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) made one such effort. The group published a version of Eucharist Prayer A in 1986 that made an attempt to incorporate language of creation that underscored our role as “creatures having language” and “poets of creation” whose speech gives voice to all living things in praise of God. The Genesis story in the text was done in such a way as to acknowledge evolutionary theories and the stewardship understanding of our role in creation, taking us out of the dominance/submission mode. An excerpt taken from an article, *Liturgy at the Heart of Creation*, by Richard Fragomeni, gives us a feel for the way ICEL blended poetry and science with theology:

In the beginning your Word summoned light:
night withdrew, and creation dawned.

As ages passed unseen,
waters gathered on the face of the earth
and life appeared.

When the times at last had ripened
and the earth grown full in abundance,
you created in your image man and woman,
the crown of all creation.

Sad to say, although ten of the conferences of bishops that constituted ICEL approved the text, our own bishops voted it down. As a result, the prayer was denied Roman approval, not only for us but also for the other conferences as well. Although it may be difficult to locate, some copies of the prayer do exist. Although you may not be able to make use of it at Mass, you might incorporate it into a prayer service or paraliturgical function.

We need to be attentive to ways in which our liturgical practices can open up our religious imaginations, helping us and those to whom we minister grasp new understandings of the universe. In a traditional prayer practice, the Liturgy of the Hours, we have Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. Reviving the practice of

such prayer on a personal or parish level may help us attune ourselves to the rhythm of the day. Our older liturgical calendar also noted special observances of the rogation days in the spring and autumn where prayer was offered for rain and for crops. As Christianity spread, the Church adopted local customs into its own liturgical practice—for example, the blessing of the fishing fleets, blessing the fields, and, of course, the Franciscan tradition of blessing the animals.

We might wish to expand our personal and communal liturgical calendars to include celebrations of Earth Day and Arbor Day; we might use the winter solstice as an occasion to celebrate the creating of the sun or the vernal equinox to celebrate the creation of the earth and the living things that inhabit it. We might wish to revitalize those ancient festivals that have come to us as May Day, the celebration of summer flowering; the feast of the Assumption, originally a harvest festival, and Halloween, originally a feast that honors one's ancestors.

Teaching people about their power to bless and encouraging them to compose their own blessings for food, for water, and for the other elements that comprise daily life, such as rain, sunshine, trees and flowers are excellent ways to foster the growth of religious imagination and appreciation for the many gifts of creation that we encounter in the course of a day. Encouraging people to adopt this practice hones their contemplative eye, enhances their appreciation for creation in its many forms, and leads them to a sense of the abiding presence of God. You might also wish to link the idea of blessing with the Navajo's tradition of the Blessing Way or with the blessings characteristic of Celtic spirituality. There are several books of household blessings and prayers that might get a person started, among them *Earth Prayers From Around the World* and *Celtic Devotional*. This latter book also has blessings for the beginning and ending of each season of the year along with prayers for each day of the week during the particular season.

Our country's traditions incorporate elements that speak of an appreciation of ecological spirituality. Although many today have re-cast the meaning of our Thanksgiving Day tradition to highlight the injustices done to our indigenous people, nonetheless, Thanksgiving Day originally expressed gratitude for

the fruits of Mother Earth throughout the entire year. I might note, it is only the Jews at Passover, our Canadian neighbors and ourselves who, as nations, celebrate a feast of Thanksgiving with a household rite—the evening meal.

The Thanksgiving celebration struck a chord with other groups of immigrants because it expressed gratitude not only for the fruits of the earth but also for the earth itself. To those “huddled masses” arriving at Ellis Island and settling on the Great Plains, the land itself was a gift given to them so they might build a new life. However flawed our Thanksgiving Day origins, we have a wonderful opportunity to incorporate ecological themes into our liturgies to assist our church communities in developing an ecological spirituality.

In a spirit of gratitude for the wonders of creation let us close with John Rutter's arrangement of a Gaelic Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you. Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you. Deep peace of the gentle night to you; moon and stars pour their beaming light on you. Deep peace of Christ, the light of the world to you.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Cultivate Awe... Harvest Justice

Part II



Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

In the previous article we focused on cultivating awe and explored the integration of eco-spirituality in our individual lives and in our communal liturgies. This article focuses our attention on models of God inspired by eco-spirituality as well as on the ethics that flow from such models. If the work of justice is not done, then none of us is able to live a fully healthy life. Below is a prayer I composed based on one version of a speech given by Chief Seattle.

How Can You Buy the Sky?

Adapted from Chief Seattle

Refrain: How can you buy the sky? How can you own the wind and rain?

My mother told me every part of the earth is sacred to our people.

Every pine needle, every sandy shore

Every mist in the dark woods, every meadow and humming insect

All are holy in the memory of our people.

My father said to me
I know the sap that courses through the trees
as I know the blood that flows in my veins
We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The
perfumed flowers are our sisters.
The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are
our brothers.

How can you buy the sky? How can you own
the wind and the rain?

We are part of the earth. It is part of us. We are
brothers and sisters of the earth.

The voice of my ancestors said to me
The shining water that moves in the
streams is not simply water

But the blood of your grandfather's grandfather.
Each ghostly reflection in the clear waters of
the lakes

Tells of memories in the life of our people
The water's murmur is the voice of your
great-great-grandmother

The rivers are our brothers; they quench our thirst,
they carry our canoes and feed our children.

You must give to the rivers the kindness you
would give to any brother.

The voice of my grandfather said to me
The air is precious. It shares its spirit with all
the life it supports.

The wind that gave me my first breath also
received my last sigh.

You must keep the land and air apart and sacred
As a place where one can go to taste the wind
that is sweetened by meadow flowers.

How can you buy the sky? How can you own
the wind and rain?

Taste the wind. It is precious to us all. Taste the
rain. It is precious to us all.

The voice of my grandmother said to me: Teach
your children what you have been taught.

The earth is our mother. What befalls the earth
befalls all the sons and daughters of the earth.

This we know: All things are connected like
the blood that unites us.

We did not weave the web of life. We are mere-
ly a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
Brother Eagle, Sister Sky, give your children
wings to fly.

Soar above our mother earth. Keep her safe
who gives us birth.

Hold us ever in your mind; to each other help
us bind.

Teach us, help us, let us see how to dwell in unity.

Brother Eagle, Sister Sky, give your children
wings to fly.

Gently as the morning dove, move our hearts
to dwell in love.

There is a connection between Chief Seattle's legacy and that of Francis of Assisi. Both understood that we are all siblings born from the same womb. Both saluted the air, the waters, the trees, the flowers, the birds and animals as our brothers and sisters. Chief Seattle's questions: "How do you buy the sky? How do you own the wind and the rain?" also resonate with Francis's vision of radical poverty and humility. We are brothers and sisters of the earth, not the owners or the conquerors. The dominance/submission model does not embody our genuine relationship with the earth; because we are not living in right relationship, we, and our planet, are experiencing various forms of illness.

Our eco-spirituality needs to incorporate the difficult, often unpopular, virtues of poverty and humility in order to challenge the greed and conspicuous consumption that contribute to many of our ecological problems. Were we to live in the spirit of Francis, and be mindful of the seven generations to come after us as Native American wisdom encourages us to do, perhaps our country would have a smaller carbon footprint than we now have. We consume an inordinate amount of the earth's resources to support a lifestyle that the rest of the world cannot afford and that we cannot maintain indefinitely due to the damage done to the earth that sustains us. Take a moment and see if you can think of one concrete way you might practice poverty and humility in order to reduce the size of your own carbon footprint, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted as a result of your activities involving use of fossil fuels. For example, could you reduce the number of trips you make that involve use of a car and take public transportation instead? Or, if public transportation is not an option, consider the type of car you use,

Concern for justice is a hallmark of the fierce Mother God who desires that all her children, not just her human children, have “enough bread” to sustain them.

the condition of the car, the speed at which you usually drive. All these factors affect the number of miles you can get from one gallon of gas. Would you consider a hybrid? Are you in a position to influence the carbon footprint of your church, your office, or any other organization to which you belong?

NEW MODELS OF GOD

Sallie McFague, a feminist theologian, invites us to view “the world as God’s body” as a way of expressing the God-world relationship in which all things have their origin in God and nothing exists outside God. The “God as King—the earth as his realm” model suggested that God’s relationship to the world was external, that God acted on the world either by direct intervention or indirectly through human subjects and that God loved the world benevolently, with charity. Using the model of the world as the body of God, however, we are introduced to a God who knows with the immediacy with which we know our own bodies, a God who is in touch with the world through interior understanding. This knowledge is empathic and intimate, a felt knowledge rather than a rational knowing or “information about.” This model suggests that God’s action in the world is interior and caring. God acts in and through the complex physical and historical-cultural evolutionary process.

Sallie McFague also encourages us to move beyond images of God in masculine form—the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth—as we recite in our Creed. Instead, she offers us perspectives on God as Mother, Lover, and Friend. She has chosen these particular models because they offer us possibilities for expressing an inclusive, nonhierarchical understanding of the world, including ourselves, as the body of God, an understanding in which the last and least of creation are at home.

When we consider the metaphor of God as Mother, we are invited into themes of creation and birthing as well as themes of nurturing and sustaining and bringing about the fulfillment of life. God as Mother is the matrix, the ground of our being and the being of the entire universe. Our view of God as Mother is not intended to lead us to passive, cloying, sentimental piety, based solely on the soft, nurturing aspect of motherhood. We are reminded of that aspect of motherhood that seeks to bring about the fulfillment of life and, as a result, judges things in light of their ability to foster or hinder that fulfillment. God as Mother is involved in the economics and management of the household of the universe to insure the just distribution of goods not only to us human beings but also to all the life forms that have sprung from her womb. The image of God the Mother encourages (with our help) the creation of a just ecological economy for the well being of all her creatures.

Elizabeth Johnson, another feminist theologian, builds on the image of Sophia, Holy Wisdom, found in the biblical wisdom literature. The bible images Wisdom as the source of life for all that exists. All creatures are siblings born from her womb, the brood of the one Mother of the universe. Holy Wisdom’s love sustains creation; She rejoices in the world’s flourishing, shows compassion to the weak and dispossessed, and pours forth her power and energy to resist what threatens or destroys the beloved creation. The prophets imaged Holy Wisdom as a ferocious mother bear ready and able to tear the hearts out of those who might harm or steal her cubs (Hosea 13:8).

We might think of Sophia asking the question: “Did I conceive and bring to birth only to throw away my offspring?” Concern for justice is a hallmark of the fierce Mother God who desires that all her children, not just her human children, have “enough bread” to sustain them.

While liberation theologies have attempted to address issues of social justice and right relationships between peoples, few of them have attempted to integrate their call for justice with the needs of the non-human creation. Leonardo Boff, however, has linked the current ecological crisis and the exploitative practices of global capitalism. Jobling and Loewen, in their article “Sketches for Earth Readings of the Book of Amos” in volume one of *The Earth Bible*, note that Boff perceives the present dominant model of society both

as a social sin rupturing social relationships and an ecological sin rupturing relationships between humankind and the rest of the environment. He recognizes that violence directed against peoples, nations and social classes results in hunger, disease and death while violence against nature leads to contamination of the biosphere and degradation of ecosystems. And, as he points out, it is not only present day people or ecosystems that are exploited but future peoples and ecosystems.

Although it might be comforting to think that a few years of restrained use would regenerate our natural resources, it now appears that once some critical point is surpassed, certain life forms may never come back. Take the great cod banks in the North Atlantic, for example. Scientists concerned with the viability of fishing in the future warn us that once the harvesting of cod has reached the critical tipping point, the entire ecosystem will be altered forever, new species of plants and fish life will move in, and the cod will not be able to return in significant numbers. By over-fishing the area we will have degraded the ecosystem on which we also are dependent. The fishing industry will suffer as will those in the wholesale/retail business, those who know the value of eating the fish, those who manufacture cod liver oil vitamins, those who rely on those vitamins, those who take fish remains and grind them into fertilizer, the land itself that would have been nourished by the fertilizer, and so on. Disruption in one area of the web of life sends shock waves throughout the entire web.

What seems to emerge from this image of God's motherhood is our need to establish an ethic of care that is holistic in scope. We Christians have a long tradition of doing good: providing services for the poor in terms of education, including education of women and ethnic minorities, as well as providing health care and a variety of services through hospitals and social service agencies. Our track record is less illustrious when it comes to involvement in eco-justice. Perhaps due to the fact that our church teachings have foundations in Greek duality, things of the earth have been ignored or devalued many times. We also have inherited a flawed concept of earth as Eden, needing no care from us while continually providing for us. A similar myth, equally flawed, is that of the earth as forgiving our abuses, healing the wounds we inflict, and regenerating itself. While the earth does have immense resources, we need to recognize that they are not infinite and that we need to exercise care in using these resources.

With the model of God as Mother and recognizing

ourselves as made in God's image, our mothering instincts might prompt us to see ourselves as caretakers of the earth and to envision human behavior that might bring about eco-justice through care. In a sense, this model of God invites us to share in a universal parenthood, a parenthood that is not limited to our own species. In recognition of our interdependence upon all and our interrelatedness with all, our universal parenthood would extend to all levels of life. As co-creators with God, it becomes our task to arrange the cosmic household in such a way that the birth and growth of other species continues in a balanced way. If we were to adopt this attitude of universal parenthood and model ourselves on God the Mother-Creator, what changes might we make in the way we envision our communities, spend our money, drive our cars, or vote on green issues?

GOD AS LOVER

Sallie McFague also offers us the image of God as Lover. While the image of God as Mother speaks of *agape*, the love that gives without thought of return, the image of God as Lover speaks of *eros* and expresses, more than any other form of love, the value of the beloved—the world—in God's eyes. Adopting the image of God as Lover opens us to a different view of life, both human and non-human. Traditional teaching has tended to focus on the effects of sin as corrupting creation to such a degree that God's love is bestowed on creation and on us "in spite of" sinfulness. To image God as Lover opens us to viewing life in all its complexity and diversity as valuable and beautiful beyond all measure. We need this vision of all life as precious if we are to have any hope of attaining an ecologically balanced, healthy world.

The image of God as Lover of creation is far from new, however. Hildegard of Bingen, writing in the 11th century, recognized God as the Lover of Creation. Gabriele Uhlein, in her book *Meditations With Hildegard of Bingen* (p. 51) quotes one of Hildegard's writings on the topic:

As the creator loves his creation, so creation loves the Creator.

Creation, of course, was fashioned to be adorned, to be showered, to be gifted with the love of the Creator.

The entire world has been embraced by this kiss. In another section of her writings, Hildegard states: I compare the great love of Creator and creation

Using the model of God as Lover of the whole creation challenges us to extend a valuing love beyond the limits of our own species.

to the same love and fidelity
with which God binds woman and man together.
This is so that together they be creatively fruitful
(p. 56).

In still another section Hildegard observes: "Creation is allowed in intimate love, to speak to the Creator as if to a lover" (p. 57).

From the perspective of God as Lover, we are invited to share in the work of healing the splits that exist in our relationships with God and the universe. We become healthy and whole as we participate in the process of making other things whole. If one of the characteristics of health is a balanced integration of all parts of the organism, the health of the body of the world involves redressing the imbalances that have occurred in part through human greed, our desire to devour the whole rather than take our place as a part of it.

Doing the work of healing cannot be equated with working miracles, however much we might wish it so. The healer doesn't just cure one diseased part of the body or fix up poor physical performance. Instead, the healer strives to restore right relationships, proper balance among the various parts involved. Healing is humbling work because there is no complete cure, just better or worse health, greater or lesser imbalances. Even when we are motivated by the best of intentions, our efforts to be sensitive to the needs of various parts of our ecosystem, flora, fauna and human, are unlikely to arrive at a perfect solution. At times, the only thing we might do is to refuse to join those who spread disease and deepen the imbalance.

As we enter into the work of healing, we find ourselves shifting our focus of attention to embrace both the active and passive phases of healing. On the active side, we engage in those behaviors and activities that represent resistance to disease, disorder or chaos. Without resorting to violence or to some form of eco-terrorism, we use our resources to combat the forces

that bring disorder to the ecosystem. This fight may be political, for example, by speaking out against a plan that would feed human greed for oil at the expense of preserving wilderness, or it may be undertaken in one's own back yard by forgoing chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer and attempting to use organic farming methods. Just as God the Mother feels anger toward and passes harsh judgment on those who would deny her children life and nourishment, God the Lover feels anger toward those who wound the body and oppress the spirit of the beloved universe.

On the passive side, however, sharing in God's work of healing involves some identification with the suffering of others. This aspect of healing involves a sense of solidarity with the other. It serves as a reminder that we are all wounded healers and that to engage in healing is to accept risk. On the other hand, to accept the passive side of healing is not to limit us to it or to glorify it. Expressions of so-called solidarity such as: "I feel your pain" are meaningless unless linked with some concrete expression aimed at fostering positive change. I recall one wonderful story of solidarity linked with concrete action that occurred during one of the Irish potato famines of the 1800s. A tribe of Native Americans, who had themselves been pushed from their own lands, sent money to help the starving people of Ireland to buy food. They really could feel the pain of hunger and displacement. A recent example of genuine solidarity with the suffering of others involves relief efforts following hurricane Katrina. The Czech Republic sent money to restore a church-operated pharmacy that offers low cost prescriptions to the poor of coastal Mississippi. Having suffered through periods of destruction themselves, the Czech people gave from the heart, not just from the purse.

Using the model of God as Lover of the whole creation challenges us to extend a valuing love beyond the limits of our own species. Valuing love derives from a sense of relationship with other beings. We might think of it as a kind of empathy or fellow feeling that unites all life. This love assumes that relationship, unity with others, even those not of our own species, is more basic than individuality or separation. This fellow feeling was appealed to when we were asked for donations for the victims of a tsunami or an earthquake that occurred half a world away. We did not have personal ties to these people, but we responded through empathic understanding of their pain and loss. Fellow feeling is also at the root of our responses to efforts to save endangered species or to assist in reforestation efforts.

If we are to develop this sort of valuing love and fellow feeling, however, most of us need to undergo the painful work of conversion. We need to move beyond an individualistic, divisive, dualistic way of thinking to one that is relational and holistic. As we see things differently, we begin to act differently. You might pause here to reflect on some changes you envision making in response to this call to conversion.

GOD AS FRIEND

The third model of God that Sallie McFague offers for our consideration is that of God as Friend. She identifies God's activity of friendship in terms of sustaining creation as well as each of us within creation. God as sustainer is the One who endures, whose faithful love lasts forever. God as sustainer bears the weight of the world, works for its fulfillment and enters into the rejoicing and suffering of the earth. And we take up our roles as friends of the divine Friend, committed to nourishing the earth and all who live in this world.

The work of God's sustaining love in friendship for all creation might evoke images of the Holy Spirit, the Creator Spirit. All creatures receive existence as her gift for she is the breath of life itself. And far from establishing the created order and then leaving us all to our own devices, the Spirit's creative activity involves a continuous energizing and sustaining for She is giver and lover of all life.

Hildegard of Bingen had a wonderful insight into the creating and sustaining love of the Holy Spirit. She referred to the Spirit's power as *viriditas*. We might translate that as *greening* or even *green power*. We see this power very clearly each spring as new buds and grasses emerge from what appeared to be the death grip of winter. We also see *viriditas* in the fruits of the autumn harvest. We might even see the greening of the Spirit at work within us, helping us to overcome our selfishness and the narrowness with which we define our communities. As our circles of compassion widen to include the stranger, those species not our own, we know that the Spirit is at work, sustaining our earth by inspiring us to join her work of friendship.

The ethic that arises from a view of God as Friend is that of companionship whose essence is understood in the shared meal. To be friends to the world means that, as adults, we join in mutual responsibility with God and others for the well-being of the world. Our participation may be expressed through advocacy and

partnership, as justice and friendship are aspects of companionship. We act as a friend, as a companion to the earth when we advocate for its needs, fighting, if need be, for just treatment for the world's many forms of life. We act as a partner with the earth when we share its joys and sorrow. I recall the great enthusiasm that flooded Washington, DC, when the panda cub was born. I recall how eager people were to catch a glimpse of the cub once he was available for public viewing. It was much the same joy I experienced awaiting the birth of my neighbor's child and the enthusiasm with which I asked to see and hold her baby. Developing a sense of companionship helps us appreciate the reciprocity of all life. Perhaps we see this most clearly in people's relationships with their animal pets—the sense of companionship that appears to bring mutual joy. And we may also be mindful of the loss that is experienced as sorrow and loneliness when a pet dies—or that is experienced to some extent by the pet when its human companion dies.

THE EARTH CHARTER

Before I conclude, I wish to mention the Earth Charter, a document published and promoted by the United Nations that is the fruit of over a decade of study and international consultation. It offers us a very comprehensive way to embody our care, love and friendship for the earth and the entire earth community. In the Earth Charter there is a special emphasis on the environmental challenges facing our world. The charter's ethical vision, however, also recognizes that environmental protection, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. The first two sections of the Earth Charter are more directly concerned with the Earth and environmental issues while the last two sections are directed toward issues of social and economic justice and democracy, nonviolence and peace. Not that these latter two sections ignore environmental issues by any means. One of the first items noted is a plea to guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil, and safe sanitation. Another seeks to ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use and environmental protection along with progressive labor standards.

In its first section the Earth Charter addresses issues pertaining to respect and care of the community of life. It invites us to respect Earth and life in all its diversity, to care for the community of life with under-

standing, compassion and love, to build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful and to secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations. Among its recommendations is a call for us to recognize that all beings are interdependent and that every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings. Another item encourages us to accept that along with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm.

Speaking of ecological integrity, the Earth Charter seeks to foster protection and restoration of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life. Recognizing that our knowledge is often limited, the charter recommends that we take a cautious approach, in essence, referring to the medical adage "First, do no harm." It recommends adopting patterns of production, consumption and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights and community well-being. A fourth subsection addresses the need to advance the study of ecological sustainability and to promote the open exchange of the knowledge that we do acquire.

Although some of the recommendations of the Earth Charter may seem highly idealistic, the authors point out that we are very much in need of a change of mind and heart if we are to appreciate the reality of global interdependence and universal responsibility. It is their hope that our time will be remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

I end with a prayer taken from the U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program. You might want to use it in your own work with groups.

Leader: Great Spirit, whose dry lands thirst,
Help us to find the way to refresh your lands.

All: We pray for your power to refresh your lands.

Leader: Great Spirit, whose waters are choked
with debris and pollution,
Help us to find the way to cleanse your waters.

All: We pray for your knowledge to find the
way to cleanse the waters.

Leader: Great Spirit, whose beautiful earth
grows ugly with misuse,
Help us to find the way to restore
beauty to your handiwork.

All: We pray for your strength to restore the
beauty of your handiwork.

Leader: Great Spirit, whose creatures are being
destroyed,

Help us to find a way to replenish them.

All: We pray for power to replenish the earth.

Leader: Great Spirit, whose gifts to us are being
lost in selfishness and corruption,
Help us to find the way to restore our
humanity.

All: We pray for your wisdom to find the way
to restore our humanity. Amen.

(From *Earth Prayers From Around the World*,
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Viola, M. Executive Director, Earth Charter International Secretariat, c/o University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica. Email: info@earthcharter.org and Website: <http://www.earthcharter.org>. In the United States, visit www.earthcharterusa.org.



Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist who practices in Washington, D.C.

High and Low Spirits

James Torrens, S.J.

DESOLATION

Your silence, Lord, is the type of torment
that widens a wound out beyond its pale.
This is a night of misery full-scale
where all is absence and sore discontent.
The soul wanders without aim, and its lament
blinds every step that seeks an exit trail.
Our thirst is deep and deep is our travail
bereft of comfort and of nourishment.
The flaccid hands drop what they once held tense.
The memory shuts down on things it's spied,
and up ahead nothing makes any sense.
How long, O Lord, will I be nullified
within this darkness now my residence.
I am Job's brother, crucified.

Osvaldo Pol, S.J.

CONSOLATION

Speak, Lord, because the heart laid bare
tenders to your voice its tidal ground,
and, quivering as desert without sound,
there's expectation in the open air.
Speak, Lord, because the heart's aware
and tangy as the fruit trees ranged around,
and in us, hidden, can a child be found
who doesn't fear what's new or yet to dare.
Through its broad, spacious avenues
the breast expands, hardy, aspiring,
with bindings loosened that it had to lose.
Hope pierces through our side with its desiring.
Audacious faith assuages each dark bruise,
while the heart in love beats on, untiring.

Osvaldo Pol, S.J.

(Translated from the Spanish by James Torrens, S.J.)

Saint Ignatius Loyola warns retreat directors—and by extension all spiritual directors—not to be content with retreatants who are continually tranquil. Activity of the Holy Spirit does not result in flat spiritual brain waves. There must at least be ongoing struggle, a bit of Jacob's wrestling with the angel. In fact, expect highs and lows, which, in the Rules for Discernment of Spirits in the *Spiritual Exercises*, are called "consolation" and "desolation."

Ignatius does not wish desolation upon anyone, any more than we wish a broken collar bone upon a high school athlete. But he recognizes that, just as ill health or injury can serve God's providence for our good, so can desolation, that apparent ill health of the spirit. At Manresa, near Barcelona, in the early days of his conversion, as he tells us in his autobiography, "he began to undergo great variations in his soul, finding himself sometimes so much without relish that he found no savor either in praying or in hearing mass or in any other prayer he made," and at other times this state was suddenly reversed 'like a person taking a cape from someone's shoulders.' He began to ask himself with fright, 'What new life is this we're beginning now?'" (*Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, Penguin Classics edition, p. 23).

At Manresa the pilgrim's determination to be free from the slightest sinfulness soon plunged him into severe scruples. In their stranglehold, he underwent terrible temptations to throw himself to his death out of a large opening in his room in a Dominican monastery. Amidst these agonies "the Lord willed that he woke up from sleep," a rescue that scrupulous people the world over would do anything to obtain. Ignatius came to realize that he was "deriving some experience of the difference in kind of spirits through the lessons God had given him."

Gerald May, in *The Dark Night of the Soul*, discusses the phenomenon of desolation as discussed by Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross. The two mystics of the *Siglo de Oro* (Golden Age) refer to the darkness of spirit not as *tinieblas*, shadowy and sinister things, but as *el oscuro*, the dark, something "pro-

foundly sacred and precious." This message threads through May's book: "To some extent, . . . various dimensions of the night are *always* going on in our lives. God is always working obscurely within us, . . . and some part of us is saying yes to God's invitation to go where we do not want to go" (p. 95).

Osvaldo Pol is a Jesuit from Cordoba, Argentina, who in two sonnets has caught those age-old alternations, the lows and the highs, in God's way of working with us. "Consolation" and "desolation" are both words for spiritual feelings, a slippery terrain but distinct enough when the feelings are intense. The poem "Desolation" takes as its opening note God's silence. The speaker, paradoxically enough, is talking to God about it, even taking God to task. This silence of God, the poem says, worsens all that is already troubling and paining us—it widens the wound.

The sense of aggravation at God's apparent absence is summed up in the phrase "the night of misery." For an illustration of this night, think of Ignatius tormented in his room in the Dominican monastery, fighting off temptations to jump. The soul in its wilderness looks for a way out, but full of grief, panicky with acute anxiety, it can't focus to see where the issue is. It is blocked from peaceful consideration.

The key here is that we really do miss God. We thirst, as the deer thirsts for the running water (*Psalms* 42), as Jesus did for the Father. We hurt from missing God. All the while, there is an undercurrent taking us to the divine. Gerald May calls this thirst or deep instinct "the soul that goes on beneath our awareness."

Desolation and its physiological sister, depression, have an out-of-time quality. Osvaldo Pol observes that we lose our grip on present affairs, our memory shuts down on things of the past that could bring satisfaction, and the future is just a blank wall. No wonder, then, that the soul cries out to God, fearing its own loss of contour and extinction. Dramatically, in fact melodramatically, the person in desolation identifies with Job, that exemplar of all those who have felt abandoned by God. At an even further extreme, he or she identifies with Christ on the cross. The identification with Christ's suffering can

indeed be salvific, once the perspective gets corrected. However, the one who says "I am Job's brother, crucified," needs enough humor and honesty to recognize how grossly the ego is exaggerating its importance and casting itself in the martyr's role.

Ignatius Loyola, after his early purification by the Holy Spirit, enjoyed frequent consolation thereafter, in particular the gift of tears. He is known to have said he could not endure a day without some consolation. He obviously had a very wide-ranging sense of the ways God can console us, and an acute sense that consolation is a divine gift, not to be merited or forced. In the divine scheme he recognized that desolation, by humbling us and hollowing us out, can function as a prayer for consolation. It does so repeatedly in the psalms.

I will call upon God,
and the Lord will save me.
At dusk, dawn and noon
I will grieve and complain,
and my prayer will be heard.
God will give me freedom and peace
from those who war against me.
(*Psalms* 55:17-19)

In "Consolation," Osvaldo Pol captures a stirring of the spirit, its awakening, its responsiveness to the Other, to the breath of the divine. "Desolation" is the voice of someone at a dead stop, mired. "Consolation," rather, charts an unfolding dynamic. The poem begins in a quiet, expectant mode, like the boy Samuel listening for the voice of God. The heart, so continually swayed, is now moved to a ready and sympathetic hearing of the Lord. The atmosphere, the inner air, no longer stale like air in a cooped-up room, is abuzz, electric.

Spiritual writers speak of the taste for God, and saints pray for it. At the time of consolation, the heart, our poet says, is like an orchard in the ripening season, with its palpable tang. In the time of consolation, our youth is renewed, as we hear in *Psalms* 103. Reading this psalm, we can think of Ignatius' rescue from his scruples.

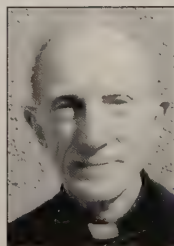
The Lord delivers your life from the pit,
surrounds you with love and compassion,
fills your days with good things;
your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The psychology movements of our times have talked a lot, sometimes fancifully, sometimes sensibly, about the hidden child. Our poet reminds us that in the heartening process of God's consolation, a youthful spirit, predating all the hesitancy and self-protective moves of adulthood, can be uncovered. We are no longer afraid of God, or of what God might ask of us. That gives us courage, allows us to make the "offering of greater moment" that Ignatius suggests in the meditation on the Call of the King. In consolation our inner life opens into "broad, spacious avenues," says the poet. Our chest expands—nobody needs a paraphrase to understand that! We are cut loose from whatever has been hobbling us.

Gerald May, in *Addiction and Grace*, discourses on all of the above with great insight. What we mean by "heart," he says, is "not only one's own center but also where one can be in closest, more directly feeling contact with the presence of God." In this presence we come to recognize our unity with all God's creation and to be less bound up with ourselves. May points out that we are relieved from bondage to who we think we are by moments of self-forgetfulness or self-transcendence.

These prolonged pauses in self-definition are moments of freedom and spaciousness. For May, "spaciousness" was a key concept. This spiritual experience can break us free from those attachments that lead to addiction. This response to God's loving but also challenging call can be the victory of grace. (See May, in Chapter 5, "Spirit," the section entitled "The Experience of Heart.")

The final word, of course, the final stage envisioned in Father Pol's sonnet, is that in the course of consolation the theological virtues thrive. Faith softens the blows of time. It heals the injuries that others, even within the Church, may have done us and the injuries we may have done others or even to ourselves. Hope, in a remarkable image, pierces our side. It goes right through our shell and shield and the ribcage around our heart, to make itself powerfully felt. No longer will what pierces us be grief or craven fear. Finally, in love with the Lord, enamored, the heart will strengthen its undying action. Charity will beat on within us.



Father James Torrens, S.J., is associate director at the Cardinal Manning House of Prayer for Priests, a place of retreats and spiritual direction, in Los Angeles, California.

The Third Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium will be held at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, in June 2007. The keynote speaker will be Rev. William A. Barry, S.J. The topic will be "Integrity." Please visit our website (www.regis.edu/hd) for details.

Union with God or Finding God's Will?

William A. Barry, S.J.

This issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT concentrates on spirituality and healthy living because this was the theme of the second annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium at Regis University. I want to contribute to this theme by focusing on a long-standing disagreement among spiritual writers about whether spiritual practices should aim at union with God or at finding God's will. I want to offer a solution to this disagreement that will point toward the kind of healthy living spiritual practices envisage.

The argument about the purpose of spiritual practices shows itself among Jesuit authors, for example, who disagree about the purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Is the purpose union with God or making a decision about how to live one's life (finding God's will)? Finding God's will often has seemed to be a quest to discover what God wants me to do or has created me to do; then we are not far from developing an image of God as the Master Planner who wants people to fit into the overall plan. This image makes God seem rather impersonal. If the purpose of the spiritual life is to attain union with God, then we are not far from developing an image of God as Lover who wants to hold us in embrace. This image worries people who believe that God wants us to try to make the world a better place. Both images have a long history, and both can be defended as orthodox, but both leave something to be desired as far as full Christian practice is concerned.

Is there a way to understand the Christian spiritual life that will unite these two seemingly competing theories? In this article I hope to contribute some thoughts that move in this direction.

THE UNIVERSE: ONE ACTION OF GOD

Often enough the search for the will of God presupposes a divine blueprint that exists from all eternity and leaves God strangely outside the action involved in carrying out the blueprint. The blueprint is eternal; our task is to figure out our part in the plan with the help of the Holy Spirit. But we often do not advert to God's ongoing activity in creation when we try to figure out our part in the blueprint. To begin my response to the question posed by the title I want to offer a way of envisioning creation not as an action that took place once in the distant past, but as God's ongoing action.

Let's try thinking of the universe as one divine action governed by one intention. To get some idea of what I mean, try thinking of some large and comprehensive decision you made, say to get married, to create a work of art, or to teach a course on auto mechanics. Each of these decisions can be seen as leading to a very complex and multifaceted single action. I once used the action of writing and publishing a book to get across a sense of what I mean by one action. (Cf. *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*.) This

one action of publishing a book is governed by one intention and includes many other actions and events that occur over a relatively long time. The action ends when the book is published and is read by others since my intention in writing the book is to have an effect on readers. You might want to work out some of the components of the comprehensive action you undertook. You will realize how complex and lengthy in time this one action is. Now let's use the analogy of our one action and apply it to God's one action that creates and sustains our universe.

Think of this vast, mysterious universe as one action of God. This one action includes all the events that have occurred and ever will occur in its existence; the evolution of the galaxies, the countless collisions of matter, the development of planetary systems, including our own, and finally our own planet revolving around our sun, thus enabling the earth to evolve plant, animal and human life. Consider this whole complex universe as one action of God. If God were to stop acting, the universe would cease to exist. This one action exists because God wants it to exist and only because God wants it to exist. The universe's existence depends, at every moment of its existence, on the gossamer thread, as it were, of God's desire.

With the advent of beings with intellect and will (personal beings), God's one creative action includes the actions of all these personal beings who have existed or ever will exist. Their actions, like God's one action, are governed by purpose or intention. Hence, God's one action includes all the purposeful actions that have ever existed or will exist within this one action, whether these actions are in tune with God's intention or not. When one thinks of creation along these lines, the mind is staggered by the complexity and enormity of what God's action entails. We can never grasp the mystery of this creation.

Why does God do it? Why does God create this universe? Like any personal action God's creative activity has a purpose or intention. But we can only know the intention of anyone if that person chooses to reveal it. I may infer your intention or purpose, but I can only be sure of what you intend if you communicate your intention to me. We believe that God has most clearly revealed God's purpose through interaction with a particular people, the people of Israel, and finally, and definitively, in one member of that people, Jesus of Nazareth. We believe that the bible is a record of God's interaction and self-communication and that through

reflection on the bible we can know God's purpose or intention in creating our world. What is that intention?

GOD WANTS OUR FRIENDSHIP

I have come to believe that God, in creating our planet at any rate, wants the friendship and cooperation of all human beings. In other words, God wants this universe to exist, in which human beings evolve, for the sake of our friendship and cooperation. This thesis seems humanly egocentric, but we have to remember what we believe, namely that God actually became a human being and lived and died "for us and for our salvation," as we say in our creed. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Our belief in the incarnation entails belief in some sort of special relationship between God and human beings. It may seem egocentric for us human beings to come to this conclusion, but it seems the clear sense of God's revelation.

I cannot here detail the full argument for the thesis that God creates our world for the sake of our friendship and cooperation. The thesis has been growing on me over many years of prayer, reading and reflection; I am writing a book whose tentative title is *God Wants Our Friendship*. Liz Carmichael's historical arguments in *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* gave me encouragement to develop the thesis. I believe that the kingdom or reign of God which Jesus proclaimed as coming into existence with his life, death and resurrection refers to a universe where human beings live in harmony and friendship with God, with one another and with the rest of creation.

If creation is one action of God governed by one intention, then God is always active in creation, not only sustaining it, but sustaining it purposefully. That is, God is always working to bring about God's intention in this one action that is the world. If, therefore, God creates our world in order to call all human beings to friendship with God, then God is always actively pursuing this purpose. With this realization we are in a position to rethink the meaning of union with God in a way that includes finding God's will.

UNION WITH GOD INCLUDES FINDING GOD'S WILL

God invites us human beings into friendship. But friendship and cooperation cannot be coerced. God

cannot have what God wants without our consent, without our free engagement in that friendship. In creating this universe God becomes that vulnerable. The divine purpose depends on human cooperation and friendship. A haunting line in Denise Levertov's poem "Annunciation" brings home this vulnerability: "God waited." God waited for Mary's acceptance of the offer.

However, God actively works in this world to draw us into such friendship and cooperation. We Christians attribute this activity to the Holy Spirit who moves our hearts and minds to accept the offer. Union, therefore, is union with God actively trying to draw all human beings into a community of harmony with God, with one another and with the whole created cosmos which is the environment in which all of us exist.

In this line of reasoning union does not mean resting in the embrace of an inactive God. Rather it seems to be an invitation to joint activity with God in achieving God's one intention in creating the universe. We are being invited to a friendship with God that helps God to fulfill God's desire. Just as with Mary, God waits on our response. God cannot achieve the dream without our free acceptance of the offer of friendship and cooperation.

In the first chapter of Genesis we read that human beings are created in God's own image and likeness and are given dominion over the animals and plants on the earth. In spite of the misuse of this text to justify the destruction of the environment for humanity's sake, one can read it as an invitation to friendship and cooperation with God's project for the universe. One can think of this invitation as analogous to a parent's invitation to the children to join the family business. God invites us to join God's family business, which is the cultivation of this universe in harmony with one another and with the environment around us.

Given this argument, we can begin to see how union with God entails action on our part. If we are created for friendship and cooperation with God in the family business that is the universe, then our deepest happiness will consist in accepting the invitation, that is, in engaging in a relationship of friendship and cooperation with God active in this world. Such an engagement entails accepting a spiritual practice. One cannot become a friend of anyone without engaging in the disciplined and demanding practice of mutual communication and cooperation. This is even truer of becoming a friend of God. If we accept the invitation, we will be engaging in a demanding discipline. Before all of you stop reading, let me assure you that this discipline does

not demand spending hours in prayer on your knees. We need to take seriously the analogy of human friendship here. The discipline required is not much different from what is required in a human friendship. Of course, we need to spend time with people if we are going to become friends, but it need not take up the whole of our life. Let me point to some of the elements needed for the development of a friendship with God.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

To develop friendship with God we need to notice that we desire such a friendship. We become friends of others because we want to. I believe that God, in desiring us into existence for friendship, creates in us a correlative desire for friendship with God. Augustine was speaking from the experience of such a desire when he wrote in his *Confessions*: "The thought of you stirs him [a human being] so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you" (I, 1, p. 21). Those who pay attention to this desire will want to grow in closeness and friendship with God. This will require spending time with God in order to develop the friendship. In the book I am writing I have some chapters devoted to ways to engage in such prayer. Briefly, it means spending time talking to God and listening to what God wants to communicate with you. It's as simple as that. It does not require long hours each day, just some time to be in God's presence. Such time could be as little as a few minutes reflecting on the day, noticing when we felt most alive and whole, a sign that we were experiencing God's presence. If people engage in the discipline of trying to become aware of God's presence, they will become aware of such times. They will also become aware of times when they are far from experiencing God's presence, times when they are out of tune with the kind of friendship God wants with us. When they notice such differences, they are beginning the process called the discernment of spirits. Here is where the question that began this article receives its final answer.

DISCERNMENT

If, as we maintained, God is actively working to draw all human beings into friendship and cooperation in God's family business, then we can understand the ancient discipline of the discernment of spirits as our

way of letting God do that work of attraction in our hearts. For our hearts are not automatically in tune with God's desire in creation; they are drawn toward many actions that lead us away from friendship with God. Our hearts need to become attuned to the one action of God drawing all human beings into friendship. God's Spirit dwelling in our hearts can become the tuning fork that enables our hearts to be attuned to God's action, but we need to engage in disciplined reflection to notice the Spirit's promptings. Such disciplined reflection begins when we notice the difference between those times when we feel most alive and whole and those times when we seem caught up in fear and self-absorption. The first seem to be movements in tune with what God wants in creation; the second seem to run counter to what God wants.

An example of such discernment is provided by Darrell Jones, a prisoner I visit who has become a friend. I knew from previous conversations that Darrell had had a conversion experience in prison. Recently I asked him what had precipitated the change in him, expecting to hear of some prayer experience. What he said was stunning in its simplicity and honesty. "I began to care for a woman who was visiting me. Once I began to care for her, I realized that I couldn't keep on living as I had been living." All it took was paying attention to the movement toward friendship with another human being and acting on that movement.

I hesitate to use the language of finding God's will at this point of a discussion of discernment because it can so easily lead to the image of God as the Master Planner. I prefer to see the discernment of spirits as a way to attune our hearts to the intention of God in creation. That intention, as I have argued, is that we all be drawn into friendship with God. If we are trying to attune our hearts with this intention, then we will gradually grow more like God; that is, we will gradually become more like the images of God we are created to be. In that sense we will find the will of God. That's what Darrell was doing, I believe.

This process of becoming more like God will require facing up to our failures to live as images of God in the past and repenting of those failures. God does have standards, after all, and as we grow in friendship with God, we realize that we have failed to live up to those standards and will continue to fail if we are not helped by the grace of God. In this process of facing up to our failures, both our personal failures and our communal failures, we will come to realize the truth of the

words of Jesus in John's gospel cited earlier, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). We recognize that if we were to continue on the path of our sinful failures we would perish. But we also recognize that Jesus, God's only Son, died for our sins and for the sins of the whole world and, thus, made it possible for all of us to repent and move back into the path of friendship with God. Moreover, we also realize that God has not given up on our world, but is still working to bring about the divine intention in creating it. The realization of God's continued and continual action in the world lifts a tremendous weight from our hearts and minds; we feel free and whole, and want to become part of the solution to the world's problems insofar as we can.

DISCIPLESHIP

A new turn in our friendship with God can now take place. In the Wisdom of Solomon we read of Wisdom: "in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets" (Wisdom 7: 27). For Christians who have grown this far in friendship through contemplation of Jesus dying on the cross for "us and for our salvation," the Spirit (Wisdom) rouses the desire to become a friend of Jesus. To become his friend means to grow into his image and likeness, to become his disciple. Friends of Jesus want to live in this world in tune with the values and dreams of Jesus, to become part of God's family business in earnest. Jesus was "about (his) Father's business" in his life. To become a disciple of Jesus means to be about the Father's business. This does not require becoming a religious professional. It means to live in whatever way of life one follows as a friend of God in the image and likeness of Jesus, sharing his values and priorities. Darrell is trying to do this to the best of his ability in prison.

I grow in friendship with Jesus by contemplating the stories of his life portrayed in the gospels with the desire to know him better in order to love and follow him more faithfully. In the course of growing in knowledge and love of him, I will have to continue to notice and discern the different movements of my heart and mind. The discernment of spirits, then, requires that I pay attention to what friendship with Jesus entails. It means overcoming my fears of openness and honesty in my relationship with Jesus. So I grow in my willing-

ness to share what is in my heart with him and to listen to what he has to say to me. In the process I begin to see that certain ways of acting and responding to life are not compatible with being Jesus' friend, just as Darrell noticed that his previous way of living was not compatible with caring for the woman who visited him. I notice that Jesus forgives those who fail and offend him and realize that I, too, am called to forgive those who fail and offend me. I see that he has a predilection for those who are poor and marginalized, and I feel the tug to follow him in this predilection. I see him forgive enemies like Saul of Tarsus, and I desire to become like him. In other words, the discernment of spirits comes naturally as I grow in my knowledge and love of Jesus; I just want to be like him, and I notice when my reactions are like his and when they are not. I am attuning my heart to his way of being a human being and thus becoming more like the human being I am created to be, an image of God. In this process, of course, I become part of a community of disciples that, in principle, wants to include all human beings.

You will notice that this account of the discernment of spirits does not focus on large decisions, but on everyday reactions and behavior. Of course, I may want to use the techniques of discernment to make large decisions, such as to decide on my vocation in life, but such use comes only after I have developed the habit of discernment through the discipline of developing the friendship that God wants with me and with every human being. With such discernment we attune more of our everyday actions to God's intention in creating the world; that is, we grow in friendship with Jesus and seek to engage in friendly cooperation with others. We try to bring about conditions more in keeping with God's dream of a universal community of human beings living in harmony with one another and with the whole of creation. These actions of ours may not be momentous, but they do make a difference in the little part of the world for which we have some responsibility. I prefer this language of attunement to that of finding God's will because the latter can tend to put all the emphasis on the big decisions, such as finding one's calling in life, and neglect the daily discernment needed to cooperate in God's family business.

CONCLUSION

If we do grow in friendship with Jesus in this way, we will be doing God's will. We will have accepted the invitation to friendship that God intends in creating us, and we will be engaged in cooperating in God's family business, which is creating a world where all human beings are friends of God and of one another and living harmoniously with all of creation. Thus union with God and finding God's will come together in the process of developing friendship with God. Discerning God's will means attuning ourselves with God's intention in creation and thus entails union with God. While engaging in the process of growing in friendship with God we will also be growing into the kind of mature human beings we were created to be, men and women who can, in the words of Sigmund Freud, love and work, i.e., care for others for their sakes and work productively in this world. Thus, spiritual practice can lead to psychological maturity.

I end with this insightful paragraph from a talk by Peter-Hans Kolvenbach to the members of the Society of Jesus' 34th General Congregation:

Ignatius proclaims that for human beings there is no authentic search for God without an insertion into the life of the creation, and that, on the other hand, all solidarity with human beings and every engagement with the created world cannot be authentic without a discovery of God (Documents of the Thirty-fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, p. 53).

RECOMMENDED READING

Barry, W. *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God: A Theological Inquiry*. Revised Edition. New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 2004.

Carmichael, E.D.H. (Liz). *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*. London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004.

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Reflections on Spiritual Direction: A Gift for All Christians

Emilie Griffin



THE APPEAL OF CATHOLIC SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As a purely practical matter, Catholics who write about spiritual life today develop a readership among Protestants. Some writers do this without knowing it. Others, encouraged by editors, readers and colleagues, deliberately use language that “crosses over” into many denominations. Henri Nouwen was such a writer. Today Thomas Merton and other distinctively Catholic writers have a large Protestant following. In my own case, I have no exact figures to tell me how many of my readers are Catholic, Protestant, or unchurched. But as I travel to various speaking engagements, meetings and conferences, I notice how many Protestants are attracted by Catholic spirituality. They want to learn about contemplation, meditation, and retreats. They practice the kind of prayer called *lectio divina*. They are attracted by silence and solitude. They are eager to benefit from spiritual direction; and they want to become spiritual directors themselves.

My first hint of this came twenty years ago when I heard a Presbyterian pastor, Eugene Peterson, talk about the importance of spiritual direction. Speaking informally to a gathering of Christian writers, Peterson urged them to commend spiritual direction as a practice which could have broad benefits for the whole of

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and guarded by Catholics, are now being
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Christianity. More recently, Peterson, who is best known as the author of a Bible paraphrase called *The Message*, has written a small book about spiritual direction, entitled *The Wisdom of Each Other: A Conversation Between Spiritual Friends*.

In *The Wisdom of Each Other*, Peterson avoids the term spiritual direction, opting for spiritual friendship instead. The book is not exactly a work of instruction. Instead, Peterson writes an imagined correspondence between himself and Gunnar, a man returning to Christian faith after a long time of unbelief. Gunnar has issues, and Peterson wants to help him address them. The style of the book is very much like C.S. Lewis's small volume, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. Gunnar, like Malcolm, is a fictional character, a composite of many people Peterson has known. As in *Letters to Malcolm*, the conversation is one-sided. Peterson's letters answer Gunnar's questions but Gunnar's letters do not appear.

Peterson's long years as a pastor are evident in this book. He is a ready listener, a wise counselor, attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in Gunnar's life. Surely, he is acting as a director though the term is obviously not quite comfortable for him. Occasionally, while he guides Gunnar, Peterson also blows off steam about superficiality and trendiness in Christian life. Yet his principal task is to keep Gunnar on the right path: "I would encourage you," he tells Gunnar, "to re-conceive your day as a ritual—a rhythmic series of movements in sacred space and time—which you enter, rather than as a schedule into which you fit yourself." Just a few paragraphs later, he reminds Gunnar of Paul's advice about how to "Pray without ceasing."

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: A RESTORATION

Well, what precisely is going on here? During the twenty-five years since I became a published writer of

Christian spirituality, I have seen many aspects of what seems to me like a restoration. Ancient Christian disciplines, long practiced and guarded by Catholics, are now being adopted by other Christians. Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, explored twelve spiritual disciplines long appreciated by Catholics: prayer and meditation, fasting, study, solitude, simplicity, submission, confession, service, worship, guidance and celebration. While Foster did not emphasize spiritual direction he began to encourage Christians to practice the spiritual life in a dedicated way. Disciplines were presented as a way of discipleship. The operative words were spiritual formation and transformation, buttressed with Biblical citations. By 1988 Foster had founded his own movement: Renovaré (the Latin verb meaning "to renew"), which calls itself Christian in commitment, ecumenical in breadth, and international in scope. Essentially, Renovaré is a teaching movement, and does not focus on membership. Those who attend Renovaré's conferences and retreats are encouraged to commit to a "covenant" statement: "In utter dependence on Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend, I will seek continual renewal through spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts, and acts of service." Yet Renovaré's followers pay no dues and are not referred to as "members." Such a minimalist approach, Foster likes to say, is modeled on the words of Samson, who wanted to "light the tails of the foxes and let them go."

I have worked with Renovaré for more than ten years, the only Roman Catholic on Renovaré's board and speaking team. During this time I have watched Renovaré encourage the development of spiritual formation groups, with a structured order of meeting. Renovaré's regional and local conferences train people to participate in spiritual formation groups. A wide range of Christian devotional reading is recommended as well. Only recently have I noticed spiritual direction and "spiritual companionship" as part of the Renovaré approach. However, without endorsing any spiritual directors or programs, the Renovaré website lists many academic sources for training in spiritual direction. Notable to me among these sources are Creighton University, Weston School of Theology, and Regis University (in Denver.)

During these last ten years I have also heard many Protestant colleagues mention that they are seeking spiritual direction from Roman Catholics.

UNITED METHODIST TRAINING PROGRAMS

The United Methodist Church is moving toward spiritual direction, by conducting training programs for spiritual formation and direction. One has been active in my neighborhood in Louisiana: a program from the Academy of Spiritual Leadership of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist church. The course is given as a two-year series of retreats entitled "The Path of Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation in the Congregation." Directed by the Rev. Carole Cotton Winn, this two-year program is now being offered for the fourth time. It began January 1, 2006. In its brochure, the program is described as follows: "the scope of the retreats includes the art of training in spiritual direction, and takes a broader look at bringing the practices of spiritual formation to the congregation. It is for those who want resources and skills which invite persons and small groups into the presence of God and which deepen the spiritual life of the congregation."

I have not attended these training retreats, but I am acting as a spiritual director for several who have gone through or are now going through the training. Each person enrolled in these training sessions is expected to have regular contact with an experienced spiritual director. My task, in our meetings, is twofold: to do what spiritual directors should do, and do it well; and to help the directees reflect on the process in ways that will strengthen them for their own work in spiritual direction.

DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE, MYSTICS AND MODERNS

One thing that struck me as I began working with these Protestant candidates was that they were being introduced to some Catholic mystics as part of their spiritual formation. Mind you, I was not recommending these books. The Methodist training program had specified them as required reading.

Especially I noticed: John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Origen. The reading list also included a number of modern Catholic teachers on the spiritual life: William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*; William A. Barry, *Discernment in Prayer: Paying Attention to God*; Thomas Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat* and *Drinking from a Dry Well*; David Regan, "Mystagogy and Experience." For help with hard-to-find books, students were referred to the Newman Bookstore in Washington, D.C.

Yet not all the expertise was recognizably from Roman Catholic sources. Protestant publishers were well represented on the reading list: Upper Room (Methodist) and InterVarsity Press as well as Westminster/John Knox Press (Presbyterian) and Pendle Hill Publications (Quaker). A number of the recommended authors were Anglicans or Episcopalians. Among these authorities were Gerald May, Alan Jones, Kenneth Leech, and Michael Gemignani.

Slowly, I began to realize that denominations are not so significant. Whether Catholic, Episcopalian, Mennonite or whatever, the recommended materials were all drawing from well-established and historic practices of spiritual direction and formation.

A NEW VOCABULARY

What strikes me about this experience? First of all, I realize that I am serving as a director in two senses. I need to do just what good directors do, that is, listen attentively, ask questions when needed, apply spiritual principles sparingly and judiciously, wait for the Holy Spirit. At the same time I suspect that I am the first spiritual director with whom these people have met or worked. Therefore, I'll be forming their opinions on what a spiritual director is like. I have a double obligation to act well.

Also, I am conscious that these directees are developing a new vocabulary for spiritual life. They are devout Christians, long time churchgoers, practiced in their own style of worship and devotion. Yet such notions as spiritual formation and spiritual direction ask more of them. And interestingly, they are entering into this program in behalf of their own congregations. They want to make the spiritual life more widely practiced and better understood.

Not all of them, by the way, are lay people. Some, both men and women, are ordained ministers. I must develop a new vocabulary, as I remind myself to think of clergy differently than in a Roman Catholic way.

DE-MYSTIFYING DIRECTION

Although I am a lay spiritual director (and fairly approachable in my personal style) I sense that newcomers come to our first sessions with a certain trepidation. "What will it be like?" they are wondering. Often they have read about spiritual direction from writers like Thomas Merton, who set a pretty high bar for the

contemplative life. If they haven't yet read John of the Cross or Teresa of Avila, they fear that they are about to do so. What in the world will be expected of them? In a sense they remind me of Catholic children approaching the sacrament of reconciliation, wondering whether they'll have to invent a few sins to impress the priest.

I remember a conversation with a Protestant Christian writer, a friend of mine, telling me she was starting spiritual direction. "I want to do the dark night of the soul!" she told me. That one conversation gave me a clue that reading the mystics may give an exaggerated view of what spiritual life is all about.

Part of my task, then, is to de-mystify the process of direction and keep spirituality down to earth. As we ease into the conversation, I encourage beginning from the ordinary business of living, lowering expectations of how grace will make itself known. Usually, though, I don't have much to do except listen. People who have come to the sessions wondering what they have to say are filled with observations, stories and reflections. I can't get a word in edgewise.

Sometimes, either before or after the session, I remember my own first experiences of spiritual direction, in rooms set aside for pastoral counseling in Catholic parishes far away from where I live now. I remember my first director, a priest who arrived in a cassock, in a room with a picture of St. Michael the Archangel overcoming the Devil. By contrast, I meet my directees in our personal library, where one wall is spiritual books and the other half more or less secular titles, with sunshine (most days) streaming through the window. Though my current environment for giving direction is less churchy and more casual, I want to be faithful, in all the ways that count, to the Catholic formation and training I myself have received.

CULTURAL DISTANCES AND "TRANSLATIONS"

As the sessions unfold over time, I become conscious that much of my Catholic cultural formation may be beside the point. The holiness of the experience comes about through our attention to the Spirit, not through any ostensibly sacramental environment. Other directors tell me they always light candles during their sessions. Not me! I find my heart turning in another direction, wanting less ritual and more simplicity. The presence of God bubbles up from the directee's life and my response, not from any external formalities we might apply.

Also, I attempt to cross the cultural divide as much as I can. While my directees may be reading Teresa and John of the Cross, I remind them that they also have Protestant writers—the Wesleys, William Law and the Quakers among them—who are deeply plunged into the spiritual life.

DIRECTEES "COMPARING NOTES"

I suppose it is inevitable that in training programs the candidates will compare notes on their spiritual directors, making recommendations, exchanging phone numbers, offering critiques. Possibly in the training sessions they have been asked to make evaluations. Should I regard this as part of the natural commerce of the process? Maybe, but here again, my Catholic reserve kicks in. I resolve to remind them that our sessions are protected by confidentiality on both sides. I am bound by secrecy in their behalf, and they should protect me (or any other director) as well. No chattering about "Here's what my director told me." Also, the director herself should remain detached, leaving open the possibility that the candidate may want to change directors.

I find myself wondering, at moments like this, whether Protestants and Catholics have different attitudes in these matters. Do Protestants set less store by confidentiality? Or are Catholics too concerned about such things?

A priest with whom I chat about this reminds me that spiritual direction is different from the sacrament of reconciliation. It is not "under the seal" or the protection of the sacrament of reconciliation. Even so, I realize I believe that confidentiality—privacy—is essential to the free exchange of the process.

SOCIALIZING

Another definite boundary, for me, has to do with socializing. If someone is my director, I need to keep him or her at a certain distance from my ordinary circle of friendship. This allows for greater objectivity and keeps the director free from the social politics of my life. I have occasion to apply this rule when one of my directees invites me to a party at her home. After some reflection, I decline. Later, when our relationship in spiritual direction may have ended, I can accept such invitations, but now, I think it best not to blur the lines between direction and casual friendship. Yes, direction

is a form of friendship, but it has a definite structure. This is part of my received wisdom as a Catholic. I think it is prudent and makes good sense. I resolve to find ways to pass this wisdom on. (On reflection, I realize I have been influenced by Catholic clergy and religious I have known over the years, who are charming in company but keep a certain distance from parishioners. It's hard to define how it works, but it seems to be a kind of propriety or decorum.)

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

As I work on the platform with such speakers as Richard Foster (Quaker) and Glandion Carney (Christian Reformed) and worship leaders like George Skramstad (Assembly of God: Anderson, Indiana), I am conscious of the heritage we have in common. They convey to me a high regard for Catholic spirituality. I admire the depth of their spiritual lives as well. Though I know we may differ on certain matters of doctrine, I am touched by their love of God. I like to think—I fervently hope—that with my small efforts I am hastening the time of greater Christian reconciliation, though it's hard to get the big picture when you're not serving on some high ecumenical commission.

Certainly, I have learned that God sends grace into all open hearts. But more than that, I am increasingly conscious of the appeal of Catholic practice, the ways that certain styles of Catholic prayer may deepen the spiritual lives of other Christians.

Some Protestant spiritual leaders worry about the shallowness of their congregations. They are concerned that many Christians are engaging in a kind of legalistic activism within their churches, serving on capital fund raising committees, lining up vigorous and well-attended programs, but neglecting the dimension of deep spirituality and prayer. Lamenting this activism in an interview with *Christianity Today* several years ago, the Denver-based Christian psychologist and best selling writer Larry Crabb said the following:

"Daily devotions, no drinking, faithful church attendance, busyness with church programs, performance-oriented Sunday worship and preaching," he says, didn't lead him to "a dynamic enjoyment of God." In fact, they seemed to be interfering. "I was finding water for my thirsty soul in classic Catholic writings." (See Agnieszka Tennant, "A Shrink Gets Stretched: Why psychologist Larry Crabb believes spiritual direction should replace therapy" www.christianitytoday.com, posted 05/02/2003.)

James Houston, a founder of Regent College in Vancouver and one of Crabb's mentors, has voiced similar concerns. Houston believes (as quoted in *Christianity Today*) that too many evangelicals have sought God "through activism, programs, conferences, applying methods, or ministries."

Programs in spiritual direction (advocated by both Larry Crabb and James Houston, among others) are cropping up at many evangelical colleges. A journal called *Conversations*, begun by Crabb, David Benner and Gary Moon, celebrates this. Through New Way Ministries (See Romans 7:6) Crabb also runs a School of Spiritual Direction and SoulCare Conferences. He has written two books that touch on spiritual direction and friendship. One of these, *Connecting*, celebrates spiritual friendship as a source of healing. Crabb calls spiritual direction "the art of discerning the deepest recesses of the soul with a sensitivity to what the Spirit is doing." A second book, *Shattered Dreams*, takes a long look at the relationship of Naomi and Ruth. To me it seems obvious that this evangelical Protestant leader is not inventing a tradition, but tapping into one that Catholics have long held dear.

When Crabb identifies thinkers who helped him design his model of spiritual direction, he mentions some Catholics: Augustine of Hippo, John of the Cross, G. K. Chesterton, Thomas Merton, Peter Kreeft and Brennan Manning. Protestants who have influenced him include Francis Schaeffer, Peterson, Houston, and Michael Card.

Brennan Manning, a resigned Catholic priest (who continues as a practicing Catholic) has also served as Crabb's spiritual director. Manning (*The Wisdom of Tenderness*) is best known for encouraging a deeper spirituality, especially among men, and is widely admired and read among Christian evangelicals. I expect that Manning's book, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*, has inspired the recent Larry Crabb title: *The Papa Prayer*. Of *Abba's Child*, one enthusiastic reader said: "great reading for worn-out evangelicals" (amazon.com) and insisted his work draws one into the mystery of the Gospel in ways that evangelical "plans of salvation" fail to do. Manning and Crabb, no doubt manifesting their long years of brokenness and self-confessed anguish, take pride in displaying overt personal affection. On meeting after long absences these two macho males kiss one another on the lips. (So much for my concern about protecting the identity of one's director!)

Having spent some years listening to Protestants idealizing Catholic spirituality (including spiritual direction) I find myself wondering whether much of this is inflated enthusiasm or hype. My own attraction to Catholic faith (I entered the church 42 years ago) was partly based on the attraction of Catholic worship and prayer. And I have not been disappointed in my quest. Even so, I am sure that Protestants who admire our spirituality are partly driven by a romantic streak. Peterson describes this well:

A number of years ago, when I was able, I used to attend Vespers with a community of Benedictine nuns. I loved the quiet simplicity of the worship, the nuns anonymous in their habits, their liturgy so natural and unforced. It always seems much more spiritual than the murkiness and fuss of my Presbyterian congregation.

Peterson got to know one of the nuns quite well. She sensed that he was romanticizing the Benedictines at prayer. One day she burst out: "You think we're in ecstasy all the time in here don't you, Eugene? You probably think we levitate while we are washing up the dishes! Well, let me tell you something. We are a community of saints and martyrs, and the martyrs are those who have to live with the saints! That cured me," Peterson confesses, "for awhile at least."

The truth is, a genuine prayer-life, a relationship with God, may be romantic at first. (Catholics sometimes call this "first fervor.") But over the long run the spiritual life can be a hard slog, requiring perseverance and encouragement—from friends, directors, and the Christian community at large.

In this unglamorous kind of spiritual life, the help of a good director is priceless. And when both parties are attentive to the Holy Spirit, differences of denomination seem to melt away.

RECOMMENDED READING

Barry, W.A., and W.J. Connolly. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1982.

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Crabb, L. *Connecting*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1997.

Crabb, L. *Shattered Dreams*. New York: WaterBrook, 2001.

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Foster, R.J. *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1978.

Green, T. *Weeds Among the Wheat*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1984.

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Lewis, C.S. *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. San Diego: Harvest Books, 2002.

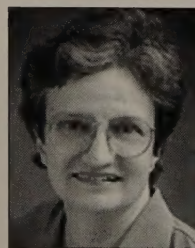
Manning, B. *The Wisdom of Tenderness*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco 2004.

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Regan, D. "Mystagogy and Experience," chapter three in *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994.



Emilie Griffin is a speaker, retreat leader, and author/editor of fifteen titles on spiritual life. She lives in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Book Review

Stretched for Greater Glory: What To Expect from the Spiritual Exercises, by George A. Aschenbrenner, S.J. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004. 213 pages. \$17.95.

Since the time of Homer nautical metaphors have been used to convey the journey of the soul. In vivid tales the ancient Greeks related how heroic discernment enabled one to navigate between the forces Charybdis and Scylla. Similarly, using nautical imagery to describe Ignatian instruments and tactics, George Aschenbrenner, S.J., in his most recent and ambitious book, instructs the reader/retreatant about strategies for sound discernment.

As the book's title implies, the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* stretches one's relationship with God. For Aschenbrenner, such soul stretching resembles a sail as it is expanded by the wind. One example of his nautical imagery is found in Aschenbrenner's description of the Fourth Week graces: "An experienced steersman has poised in a balance, magnificent to behold, the stretched sails of your soul, bracing and bending with the wind, and has readied you to cut through choppy surface waves to a sure destination."

Aschenbrenner wants his reader/retreatant to sense the directionality of the *Exercises* and his detailed writing leads to an explanation of their inner dynamics. Presenting first an outline of Ignatius's life, followed by an overview of the Four Weeks and then a series of observations, Aschenbrenner guides the reader into the breadth and depth of contemplative experiences. His expertise and familiarity with the *Exercises* is obvious, and many complex topics are clearly conveyed. By means of descriptions, definitions, and distinctions within Ignatian developmental phases, Aschenbrenner provides enlightening commentary on dozens of the most important annotations of the *Exercises*.

The dynamics of each one of the Four Weeks are presented through a series of chapters, whose titles indicate a creative reframing. These include: *A Forgiven Sinner: Awed in Gratitude* (First Week); *Readied for*

Wise Loving (Second Week); *A Cosmic Confrontation* (The Two Standards); *Choosing and Loving Always for God's Glory* (The Election); *A Compassionate Joy Beyond Any Disappointment* (Third Week); *Daily Life: Gratefully Serving God in All* (Fourth Week).

Spiritual Discernment is given special attention wherein a treasury of insights surface. Revealing his considerable expertise and experience with Ignatian discernment, Aschenbrenner, a former novice director, makes cautious as well as encouraging explications that serve to navigate one's overall life-direction. He notes that a more effective translation for the Ignatian term "magis" is "especially, specifically, uniquely" in the sense of discerning one's authentic vocation. Also Aschenbrenner considers consolation as containing three moments which when fulfilled lead to a "double conflagration." He states that in consolation, "...you burn both with an inner fire of intimacy with the risen Jesus and with a growing flame of desire to have that fire shape our universe to even greater justice and unity."

While the text is intended for those seeking greater meaning in life, my one concern is that it may be a bit too complex for one unfamiliar with the *Exercises*. This important work may prove to be of greater value as a reference for those giving the *Exercises*. In addition, this book may serve to enhance a personal and communal sense of mission. I am aware, for instance, that the book's contents were enthusiastically received among West African Jesuits as they give birth to a new mission identity.

This important work with its plethora of insights and inspiring passages will help the reader to arrive at a greater appreciation for the spiritual depths of the *Exercises*. As a spiritual guide Aschenbrenner has once again proven worthy of presenting a rich understanding of Ignatius's *Exercises*, and Aschenbrenner's spiritual strategies may help one's soul to navigate as its sails are stretched for the greater glory of God.

– C. Kevin Gillespie, S.J.

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Letter to the Editor

I am writing to set the record straight in the wake of editorial inaccuracies in the publication of my article, "Forming Ministers for the 21st Century" (Vol. 26, No. 2, Summer 2005), which have led to a misattribution of ideas in J.E. Owens' article, "Inside/Outside the Camp: Places of Encounter" (Vol. 27, No.2, Summer 2006). The article by Owens (and responses by Dymowski and Moorman), taking off from my article of 2005, attributes to me several key concepts (notably, "itinerancy," "moving outside the camp," "organizational aversion," and "the shift from the twentieth century's 'turn toward the subject' to the twenty-first century's 'turn toward the social'") which are actually the fruit of David Couturier's insights and creative thinking.

In my original version of the 2005 article, I took great pains to give Couturier full credit for his ideas. Unfortunately, in the editing process all the footnotes were removed and were not replaced with adequate references in the text. This poorly edited version of the article was then sent to press without my review and thus without my having a chance to correct the situation. As Couturier knows, every time I have interacted with individuals and groups around the article, I have clearly identified his essential contributions to my work, and have referred people to his original presentations and websites. I would like to inform interest-

ed HUMAN DEVELOPMENT readers that the Spanish and Italian translations of my 2005 article with all the original footnotes included are posted on the HUMAN DEVELOPMENT website for reference (www.regis.edu/hd).

I appreciate your concern in this matter and your willingness to communicate this situation to your readers, so that due credit may be given to David Couturier for his ideas, which inspired me, and, through me, inspired Owens and his colleagues. I trust that Couturier's creative thinking on these and other topics will continue to inspire many readers for a long while to come. For the information of your readers, some of Couturier's original texts may be found at: www.ofmcap.org/doc/david_couturier-international_compassion-en.pdf, and at www.franciscansinternational.org.

Sincerely yours,
Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.

The Editor thanks Dr. Saffiotti and regrets the inconvenience caused by our editing. We will make every effort to see that nothing like this happens again.